

San Juan County Home Energy Rebates Listening & Work Session

Report Out Memo
Bluff, Utah
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Background

In 2024, in San Juan County, UTST and C4 Evergreen brought a group of local leaders together to meet with Utah's Office of Energy Development (OED) and Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) staff to discuss the importance of weatherization and energy efficiency funding in the area, especially with the unique characteristics of the county's housing stock. The group focused on lifting up opportunities in the area, including workforce development, local economic growth, and healthier and more efficient homes in the county and Navajo Nation. Following this visit, the Office of Energy Development agreed to set aside approximately \$8 million, or about 20% of the HOMES program (Section 50121) of the Home Energy Rebates funding, to target tribal lands in the state of Utah.

Utah's Home Energy Rebates Program (HER/HOMES) is a combined \$100,998,902 grant program intended to support household energy performance and appliance upgrades.

The funding, awarded to the state in January 2025, falls in two programs:

- 1) **The Home Efficiency Rebate** (Home Energy Performance Based, Whole House Rebate, also 'HOMES') is designed to fund energy performance measures like building envelope, heating and cooling, and water heating projects for existing single and multi-family housing. The HOMES program's rebate calculation is based on the families' annual median income (AMI) and the level of energy savings attributable to the upgrades.
- 2) **The Home Electrification and Appliance Rebates** (HER or HEAR) is designed to fund specific appliance upgrades like insulation, air sealing, ventilation, heat pumps, electrical panels and wiring for new and existing single and multifamily housing. The HER program only applies to households under 150% AMI, and the rebate can fund \$7,000 to \$14,000 of appliance and energy efficiency improvements.

About San Juan County

According to the Department of Energy's [Low-income Energy Affordability Data \(LEAD\) Tool](#), Utah's average energy cost burden is 2%, and the average energy household cost is \$1,945. By comparison, the average household energy cost in Monument Valley, Utah, on the Navajo Nation, is 7-9%, and the actual energy cost is \$4,031 per household. Across the portion of the Navajo Nation that overlaps with the state of Utah, households face a higher energy cost burden than the vast majority of Utahns.

The Listening Session

On Monday, March 23rd, 2026 over 30 tribal, county, community and state leaders gathered to discuss the implementation and design of Utah's HER and HOMES Programs in San Juan County, Utah. This session was the first of many that the implementer for the state's program, GreenCat, will conduct as part of the community-engaged implementation phase. Participants discussed the nature of San Juan County, barriers to adoption of the program and current weatherization programs, and how the implementer can maximize benefits and minimize barriers to realize the program's robust potential for success.

Key Barriers:

1. Some home sites lack electricity services in the first place. The program should be designed (as possible dependent on DOE program guidelines) to ensure the maximum benefit to these residents as well, focusing on health and comfort outcomes.
2. Home site lease agreements are difficult to update, and families can't always navigate the paperwork burdens to officially transfer the lease agreements between generations. The result is many homeowners residing on deceased parents' land without having the homesite in their name. Programs like the Weatherization Assistance Program (WAP) and Home Energy Assistance Target (HEAT) Program, both administered in San Juan County through the Southeastern Regional Development Agency (SERDA), have learned lessons about navigating this challenge.
3. Limited community trust in the program, in part because of delays in implementation, and in the ability of the state to deliver rebates fairly. This listening session was well-received by community members, however additional trustbuilding will be critical to ensure adoption in the county and throughout tribal lands in Utah.
4. Consistent collaboration with the Navajo Tribal Utility Authority (and all other utilities in the area like Rocky Mountain Power and Empire Electric Association) will be essential. Participants emphasized the importance of ensuring benefits are received by community members even in the event utility rates increase after installation.

Maximizing Outreach:

1. Hire community liaisons, fluent in Diné Bizaad (Navajo language), to conduct home visits and communicate the program directly to community members. These liaisons ideally would be hired from the community, and already know community members. Liaisons could work in community and senior center locations in the area to develop a physical presence in the community, and work directly with Chapter House officials to maximize information sharing on the program. These liaisons should also be knowledgeable on other services

and programs offered in the area, like SERDA's WAP and HEAT, in addition to local food services, workforce development programs, and more.

- a. The program could also follow [Arizona's model](#) for implementation and target consumers in heating and cooling emergencies, like those on WAP and HEAT lists across the state. Targeting this population first could address immediate needs beyond those serviceable by current programs while deepening coordination.
2. Make information readily visible in places beyond Chapter Houses, including gas stations, high schools, day care centers, and health centers like the Utah Navajo Health System locations.
3. An effective communication strategy will be critical to reach the broad and diverse population in the county. Participants specifically mentioned information should be shared on local radio stations and social media channels.

Key Recommendations:

1. Develop a community outreach plan that provides direct information about the program to residents. The plan should include identifying and utilizing locally-relevant communication methods—on the Utah portion of Navajo Nation, this includes radio stations like KNDN.
2. Maintain consistent communication with Tribal Nation governments, including directly with the Navajo Utah Commission, Chapter Houses, and the Office of the President of the Navajo Nation. County Commissioners are willing to help coordinate communications with state agencies and local officials. This communication will be most effective by including program updates, timelines, and implementation information as soon as it is available.
3. Establish a closed contractor network to ensure beneficiaries do not have to pay up front costs of upgrades, and are solely responsible for the remaining cost of work performed to the contractor, as applicable based on the beneficiary's AMI. Up front costs will be a critical barrier to program adoption in San Juan County and other low-income, rural areas in the state. Minimizing up front cost by directly paying contractors for work performed ensures beneficiary adoption and expedient payment to the contractor.
 - a. [New Mexico](#), [Arizona](#), [Michigan](#) follow this model, ensuring all costs to the beneficiary are communicated before work is performed, paying the registered contractor performing the work first. Any remaining balance is paid by the beneficiary.
 - b. [Indiana](#) and [Colorado](#) have designed a similar process, however rebates are communicated to beneficiaries as a "discount" on the appliance and labor costs performed by a registered contractor.
4. Consider "triaging" or bundling residential rebate projects in San Juan County and other rural areas in the state to generate sustained program demand. This would not only ensure contractors who do not currently operate in the area

can justify time and travel, but reduce costs due to the remote nature of the county and Utah portion of the Navajo Nation. Participants in the Listening Session mentioned costs can vary widely across the area, in part due to geographic limitations and the extreme rurality of many communities here. Bidding residential rebates together could present multiple benefits including thorough planning of incentive stacking (like using WAP and HEAT programs first), and allow contractors to plan out multiple years of upgrades. This strategy could also increase the workforce and economic development opportunities of the program, creating opportunities for local trades people to stay in the county for longer term work.

5. There is a strong desire to ensure local workers and contractors are hired on projects, and for the program to prioritize training opportunities on those projects. Including local hire and training hour requirements on the Request for Qualifications requirements for contractors applying to the registered contractors list is one way to reach this goal.