

# Making Energy Efficiency Attainable for Low-Income Multifamily Properties

*By: Jennifer Amatore, Senior Program Manager, National Grid*

In a normal year, making energy-efficiency upgrades that could lower monthly energy bills would be standard operating procedure for multifamily property owners. However, this year is anything but normal, as landlords and tenants alike continue to feel the economic hardship of COVID-19, especially during these brutally cold winter months.

Owners of low-income multifamily properties have especially been hit hard by the challenges of 2020, and any investment in energy efficiency is highly unlikely.

The good news is that programs exist to help Rhode Island multifamily property owners navigate these unprecedented times and still make the energy-efficiency upgrades needed to keep tenants warm during these colder months. For instance, the Income-Eligible Multifamily Retrofit program provides no-cost upgrades and comprehensive building assessments to improve the energy efficiency of multifamily properties.

To qualify for the program, multifamily properties must be residential buildings with five or more units and/or residential properties consisting of four or more one- to four-unit buildings that are both connected or adjacent to each other or to a more than five-unit building and owned by the same individual or firm.

Income-eligible properties must also meet one of the following criteria:

- Be owned by public housing authorities or community development corporations.
- Receive affordable housing tax credits or any type of low-income funds/subsidies from state or federal governments.
- Consist of building units where 50 percent or more of residents qualify as income-eligible customers, defined as having incomes 60 percent or below the area median.

If a property owner has any questions about their eligibility, utilities will gladly speak with them one-on-one to confirm this. If the criteria are met, then a variety of energy-efficiency projects based on the individualized needs of each property can be covered at 100 percent of the cost, including:

- Lighting
- Smart strips



- Thermostats
- Air sealing
- Insulation
- Showerheads and aerators
- Refrigerators

Other projects, such as heating and cooling system upgrades, can be covered up to 100 percent.

The program serves as an important incentive to achieve many of Rhode Island's goals for a greener future while also providing help to those who need it most. During the colder New England months, the program will help to not only improve the overall value and energy efficiency of these multifamily



properties, but will also ensure the comfort and safety of low-income tenants.

### Building Resiliency

As the statewide transition to energy-efficiency continues to gain momentum, multifamily buildings are especially targeted. According to a [2018 Multifamily Executive Magazine](#) article, approximately 66 percent of rental units across the United States were more than 30 years old in 2016.

Since an efficient building is a resilient one, the Low-Income-Eligible Program serves as an important resource for helping multifamily owners improve an older property's long-term value and operational efficiencies. Energy-efficiency projects, such as weatherization, insulation and heating upgrades, can improve the comfort level of these units and lower vacancy rates, reduce energy consumption and help protect the bottom line.

### No-Cost Assessment Leads to No-Cost Incentives

Available to natural gas, electric, oil and propane-heated buildings, the Low-Income-Eligible Program, to date, has served more than 220,000 residential units, assessed more than 13,000 buildings and saved \$102.7 million in energy upgrades—all with zero dollars invested by the owner.

Since a transition to energy efficiency is not always straightforward, utilities in the program, such as National Grid, offer a no-cost building assessment to determine which types of upgrades are the most impactful for that specific low-income property.

As no two buildings are the same and require the same types of improvements, these no-cost assessments come with the expertise to determine the upgrades that will not only improve the value of the building itself but have the most impact for its residents.

To learn more about the eligibility requirements call 888-633-7947.