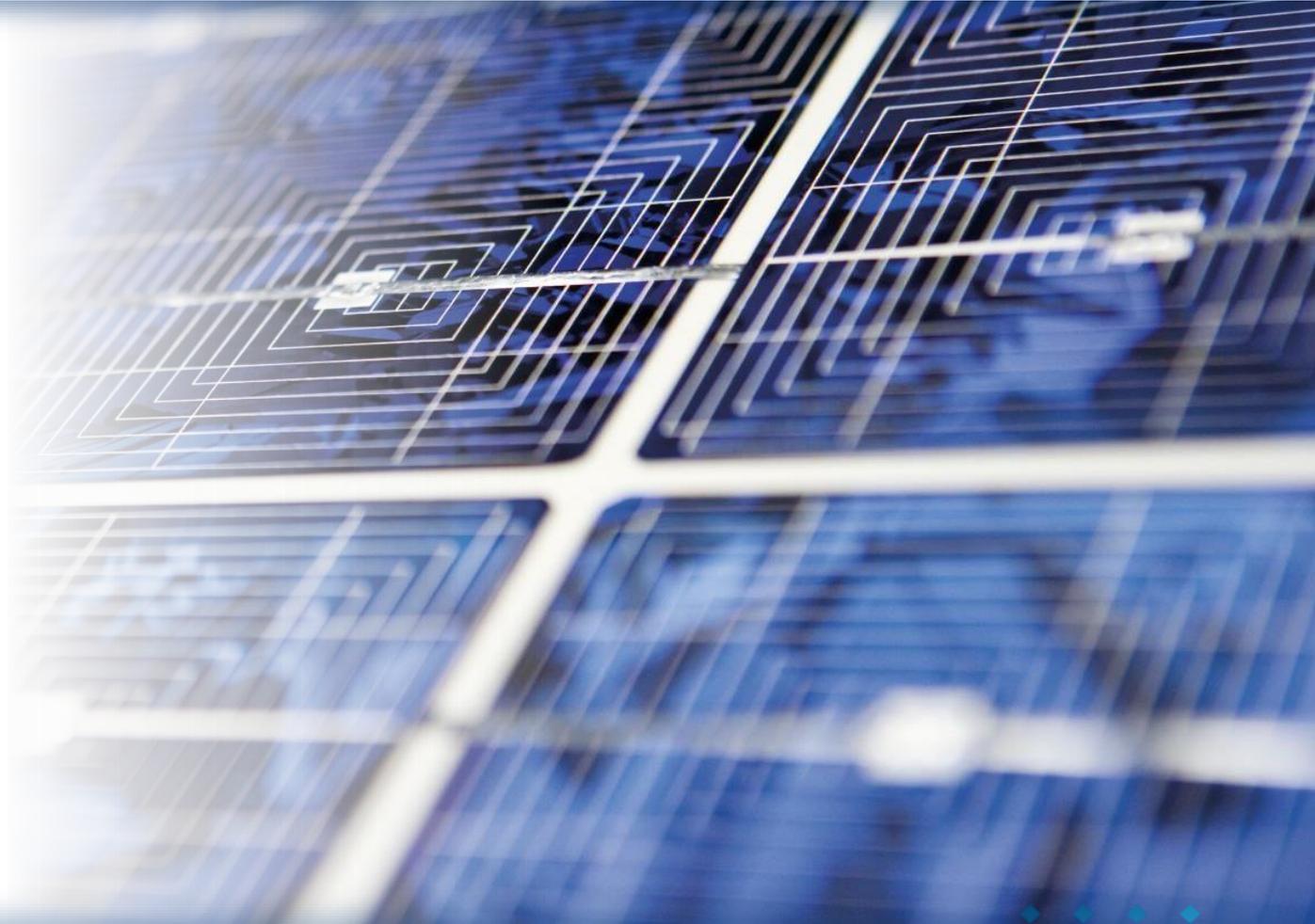


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# 2021 EMPOWER COMMUNITIES STUDY

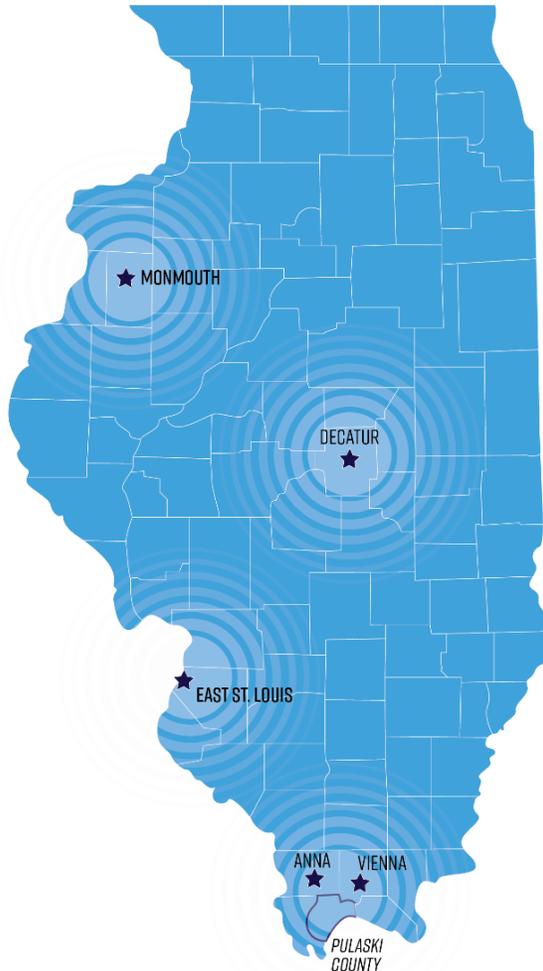
Summary of Findings  
and Recommendations

September 8, 2022



# Ameren Illinois Company (AIC) Empower Communities Study Overview

## Empower Communities in Study

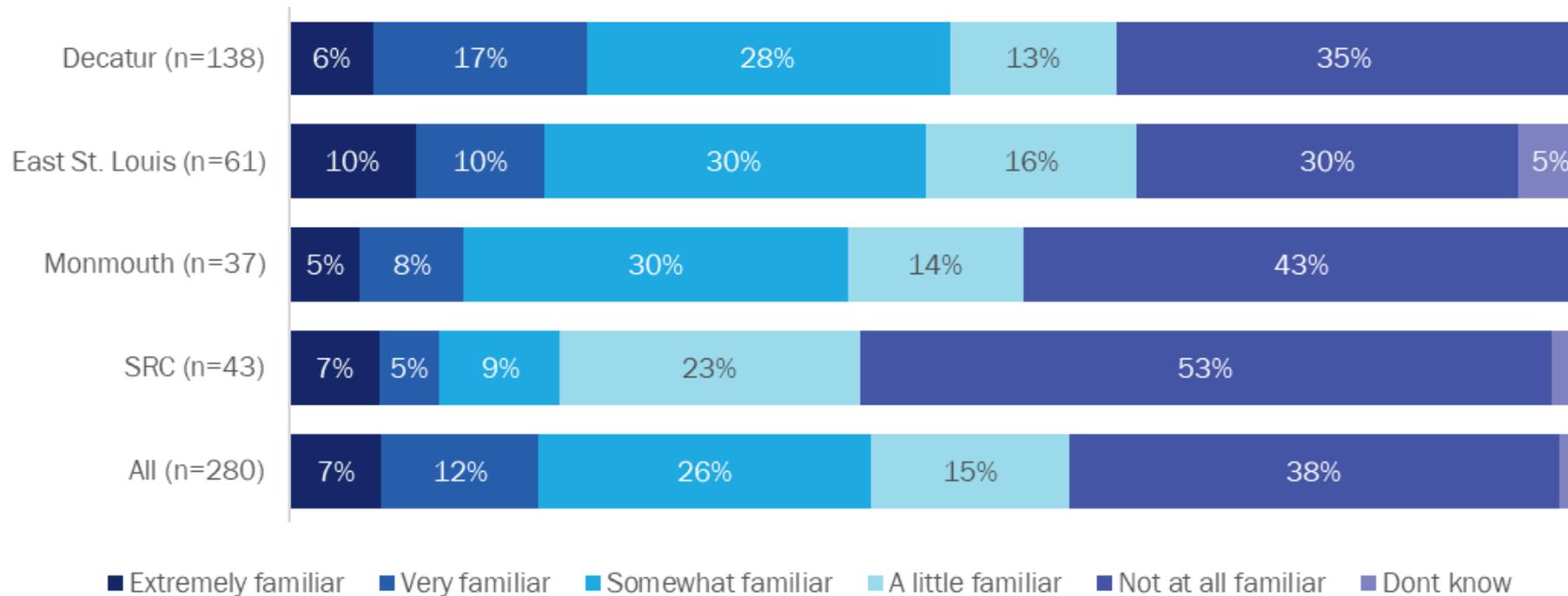


- Deep dive into four economically disadvantaged and/or diverse “Empower Communities”
- Objectives:
  - Assess barriers to AIC initiatives participation
  - Understand energy/non-energy needs
  - Refine Empower Communities definition and support the Market Development Action Plan (MDAP)
  - Identify community-specific engagement strategies
- Interviews with 21 community leaders
- Survey of 280 AIC small business customers
  - Small businesses and community-serving institutions (CSIs)
  - Many women-led and minority-led organizations
  - Wide variety of business/organization types

# Familiarity with AIC EE Offerings

- About 4 in 5 respondents had limited or no familiarity
- Smaller communities less familiar (SRC=Southern Rural Communities)

Familiarity with AIC Energy Efficiency Offerings, by Community



# Marketing, Education, and Outreach (ME&O) Strategies

- Mix of paper/email preference
- Email recall can be a challenge
- Leaders: “Boots on the ground”

## Recommendation Highlights

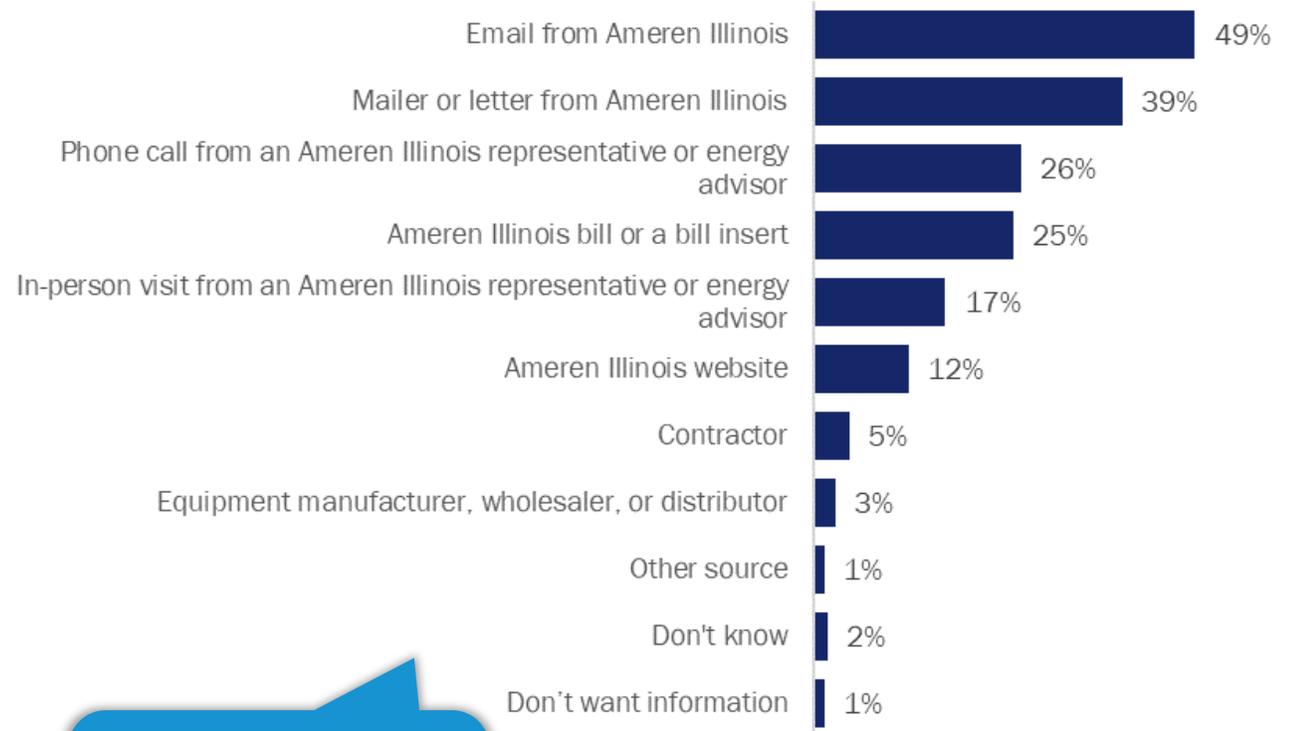
Focus on a mixture of ME&O tactics and multiple touches

Continue to rely on input from community experts

Consider mailed letters or canvassing flyer paired with in-person visits

Continue to pursue strategic community partnerships

## AIC Communication Preferences



Paper mail and websites are the biggest drivers of past awareness

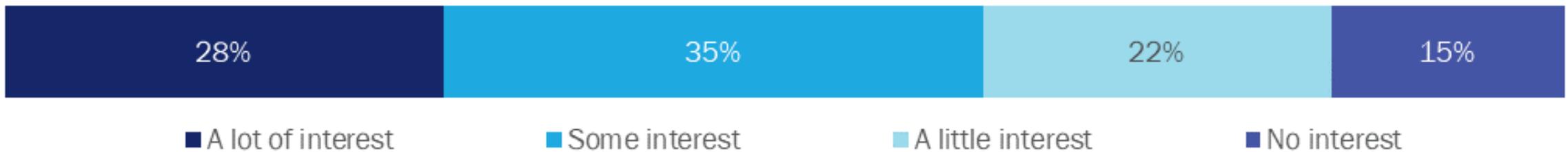
n=280 (Multiple Responses Allowed)

# Interest

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- Moderate interest in AIC offerings
- CSIs and minority-led organizations are more interested

Interest in Participating in AIC Energy Efficiency Offerings (All Organizations)



n=275

# Competing Priorities and Lack of Control

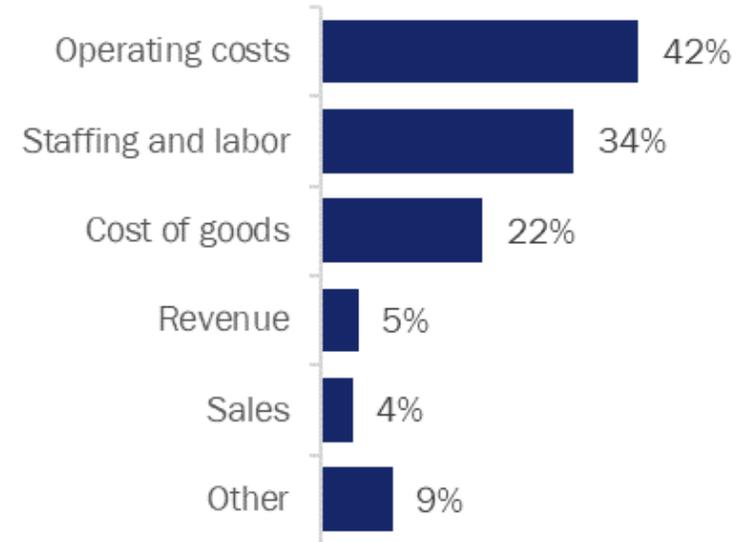
## Common perceptions of energy costs:

- Little to no concern affording them
- Moderate/little impact on financial performance
- Viewed like other “fixed costs”
  - Many feel they have done what they can
  - Doing more feels out of reach

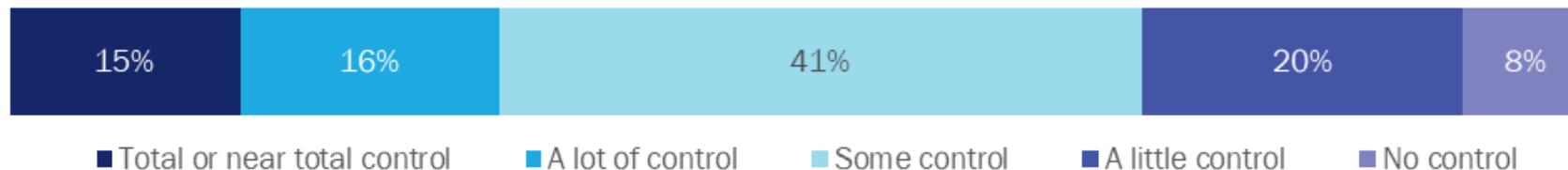
## Mid-tier priority:

- Many other high priorities
- Energy costs are the same level or lower priority

## Higher Priorities than Managing Energy Costs



## Perceived Control Over Energy Costs



Lack of control and “getting approval” is a more common challenge for CSIs

n=280

# Other Key Barriers to Making EE Upgrades in General

<b>Affordability</b>	Upfront cost of investment too high (57%)
<b>Org Policy</b>	Policy to avoid early replacement (52%)
<b>Structural</b>	Limitations related to having customers or employees in the facility (44%)
<b>Knowledge</b>	Unsure how to adjust controls (45%) Unsure what upgrades to make (38%)
<b>Supply Chain</b>	Finding qualified contractors or equipment (41%)

## Recommendation Highlights

Continue to keep Small Business Direct Install (SBDI) co-pays as low as possible

Explore strategies to expand Program Ally network and reach

Emphasize availability of controls upgrades

Leaders noted a lack of Program Allies in East St. Louis and SRC

n=280

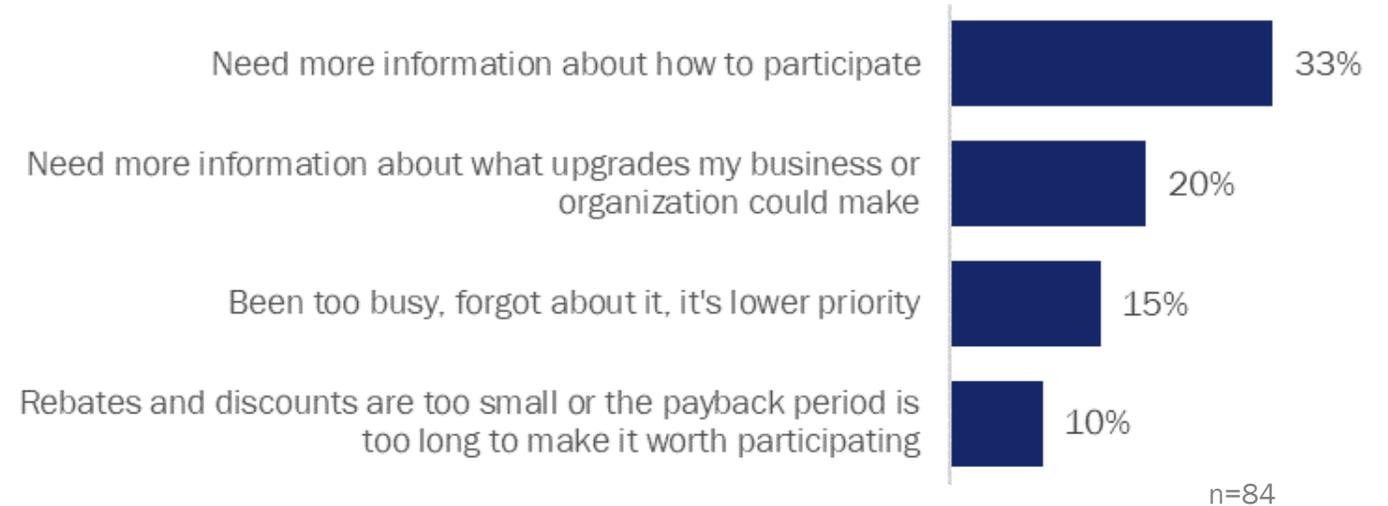
# Other Key Barriers to AIC Participation

- Lack of information
- Time

Decatur leaders mentioned time barriers more often than other communities.

"Great, just something else for me to fill out.. I'm already stretched for time running a business and managing my people."

## Top Four Barriers to Participating, Beyond Awareness



Note: Multiple Response. Excludes organizations that are unaware of OR have already participated in AIC offerings

## Recommendation Highlights

When marketing SBDI, highlight the convenient, turnkey nature of the offering

Use Virtual Commissioning to tackle multiple barriers at once

# Stated Energy-Related Needs

- AIC offerings align with perceived needs
- Most acknowledge opportunities for improvement
- HVAC and lighting are universally top of mind
- Weatherization was the most common need

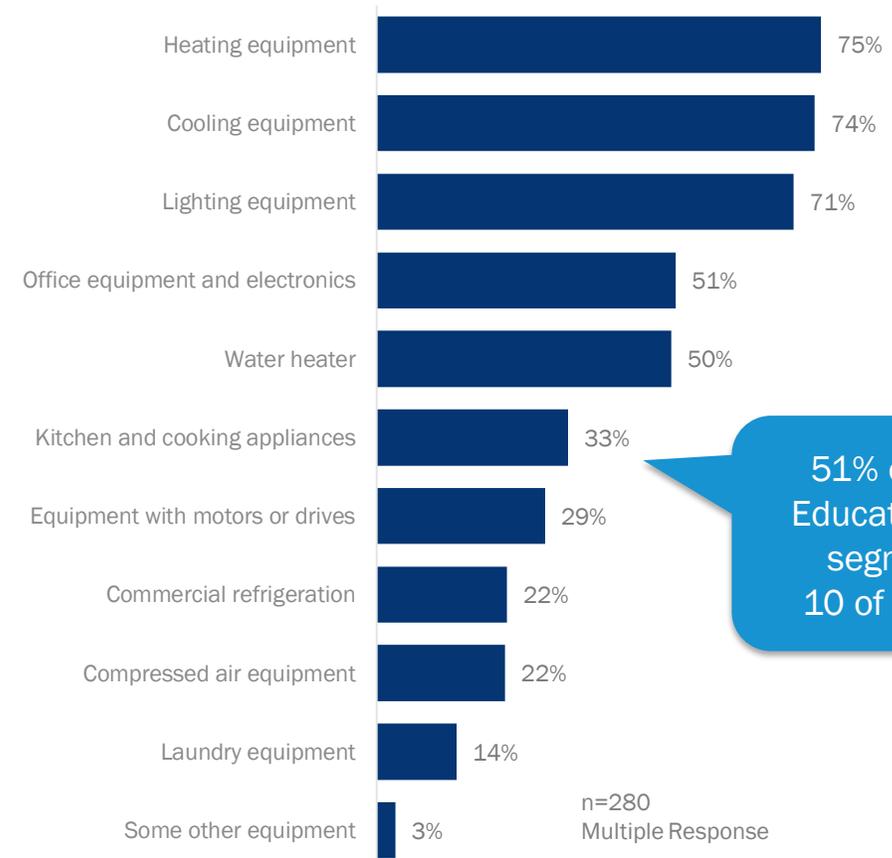
## Recommendation Highlights

Continue core offerings of SBDI and Small Business Energy Performance (SBEP)

Promote food service offerings, especially for CSIs

Increase ME&O focus on SBEP in Empower Communities

## Perceived “Biggest Energy Users”



# Women-led, Minority-Led, and CSI Organizations

- High need groups key to expanding participation
- More interest in participating
- More inclined to seek outside assistance
- Supports current MDAP strategies
- Opportunity to expand the Empower Communities definition

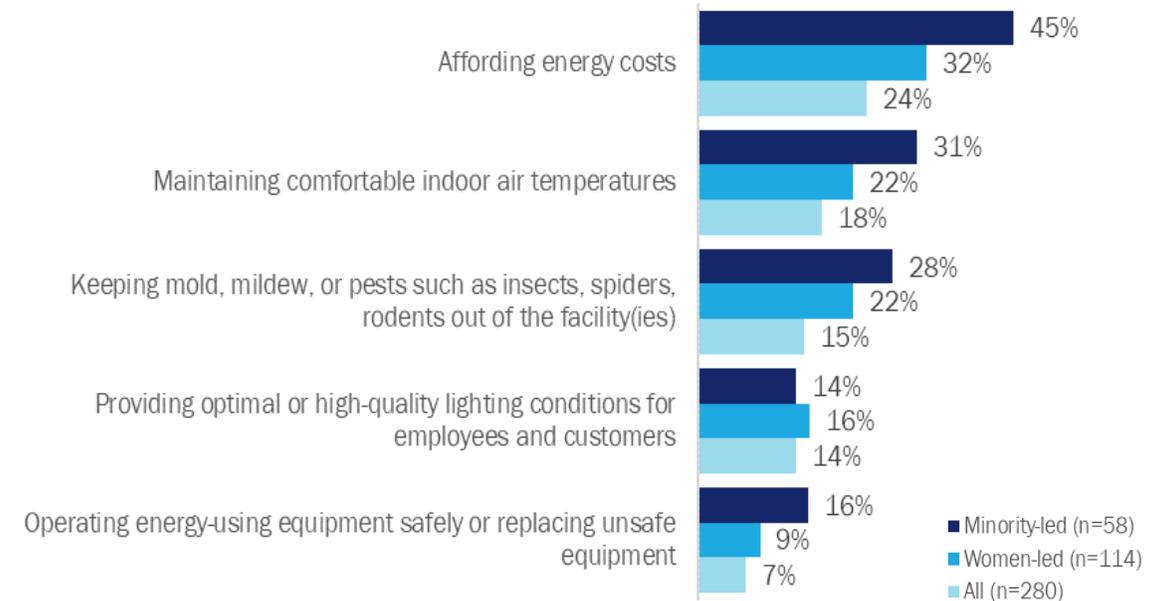
## Recommendation Highlights

Increase ME&O emphasis on CSIs, women-led, and minority-led organizations

Empower Communities index should continue to prioritize predominately income-qualified and/or non-White communities

Include non-residential ownership demographics in Empower Communities index; or create an alternative index

## Percent Reporting “A Lot” or “Some” Difficulty



# Decatur

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- Large city with plentiful opportunities
- Skepticism and time are more common barriers
- Focus on building trust and community presence
- Important to carefully time in-person engagements

## Recommendation Highlights

Expand partnership with the Decatur Regional Chamber of Commerce

Focus on word-of-mouth marketing (testimonials, referrals)

ME&O messaging should emphasize convenience, the ease of participation, and/or concierge-like elements of offerings.

Partner with the Economic Development Corporation of Decatur-Macon County.

Words Used by Leaders to Describe Decatur



# East St. Louis

- Large city with major historical socioeconomic challenges
- Strong sense of community and hope for the future
- Many non-profit, education, and religious organizations
- Upfront cost may be particularly challenging
- Older buildings with high need for upgrades
- Critical supply issue: lack of qualified contractors

## Recommendation Highlights

Consider increasing the number of SBDI mini grants available specifically to East St. Louis.

Pursue partnerships with faith-based and education-focused organizations.

Explore ways to grow the local workforce (e.g., scholarships, partnerships)

Consider partnerships with well-known local fraternities or sororities, such as Delta Sigma Theta

Invest in incubator spaces and startup accelerators

Words Used by Leaders to Describe East St. Louis



# Monmouth

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- Small college town in the upswing of recovery
- Growing immigrant population
- Critical to work through well-connected, influential individuals
- The Town Square and Monmouth College Stadium are key community gathering spots

## Recommendation Highlights

ME&O messaging should connect to the spirit of economic revitalization

Build word-of-mouth reputation through testimonials, referrals, co-attending events

Expand use on non-English languages: Spanish, French, and Chin

Focus on visual advertisement (e.g., signage, billboards) in Town Square and the College Stadium

Explore partnership opportunities with the Jamieson Community Center

## Words Used by Leaders to Describe Monmouth

A word cloud where the words are arranged in a roughly circular pattern. The word 'diversity' is the largest and most prominent, centered in the lower half. Other words include 'caring' at the top, 'industrious' below it, 'downtown square' to the left, and 'latino' at the bottom. The colors range from light blue to dark blue.

caring  
industrious  
downtown square  
diversity  
latino

# Southern Rural Communities (SRC)

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- Tapestry of unique communities–no “one size fits all”
- Disconnectedness and out-migration
- Growing mental health crisis in Anna and Vienna
- “Swiss cheese” map of electric co-operatives
- Lack of Program Allies but not local contractors
- ME&O deprioritized

## Recommendation Highlights

Pursue tailored strategies for each of Anna, Vienna, and Pulaski County. Further diversify efforts within Pulaski County.

Explore partnerships with regional orgs Southern Five and One Shawnee

Explore partnership opportunities with the Shawnee Community College Small Business Development Center

Focus on institutional upgrades and partnership in Anna and Vienna

Consider strategic promotions or partnerships with school districts or school events

Recruit the local contractor workforce

## Words Used by Leaders to Describe SRC



# Next Steps for Ameren Illinois

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- Pursue mixed-mode and “stacked” ME&O in Empower Communities
- Leverage existing outreach to proactively address barriers
  - Direct discussions with customers
  - Community presentations, e.g., with Chambers of Commerce
- Focus SBEP efforts in Empower Communities
- Explore community partnership recommendations from study
- Establish a Community Ambassador approach



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## Contact:

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Director

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# Supplemental Slide: Survey Respondents Summary (1/2)

## Survey Respondents by Segment

Segment Group	Number of Respondents	Description (Most to Least Common Examples)
Services	52	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>In-store services, (e.g., tax, insurance, and legal services; barber shops, salons, and massage therapy)</li> <li>Real estate and property management offices</li> </ul>
Retail Store and Entertainment	45	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>In-store goods, such as clothing stores, and auto parts</li> <li>Grocery stores, butcher shops</li> <li>Convenience store, including gas stations</li> <li>Entertainment and fitness venues, (e.g., theaters, gyms, and event spaces)</li> <li>CSIs are thrift stores associated with charities</li> </ul>
Nonprofit, Education, and Religious	39	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Churches</li> <li>501(c)(3) nonprofit organizations</li> <li>Daycares, small schools, and educational facilities, one library</li> </ul>
Supplier/Warehouse	27	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Equipment and product suppliers, often including combination office/warehouses</li> <li>Warehouses and storage facilities</li> </ul>
Vehicle Repair and Manufacturing	26	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Vehicle repair and service</li> <li>Heavy machinery, chemical, paint, and other types of factories and forges</li> <li>Digital and other printing</li> </ul>
Contractor	22	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Offices for trades typically provided outside of the business grounds, (e.g., HVAC contractors, janitorial, plumbers)</li> </ul>
Housing	17	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Small multifamily properties (e.g., duplexes, triplexes, small apartment buildings)</li> <li>RV and mobile home parks (may be on-site offices)</li> <li>CSIs are two public housing authorities and one homeless shelter</li> </ul>
Agriculture and Animal Husbandry	16	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Farms, ranches, and equestrian centers</li> <li>Grain and seed providers</li> </ul>

# Supplemental Slide: Survey Respondents by Segment (2/2)

Survey Respondents by Segment (Continued)

Segment Group	Number of Respondents	Description (Most to Least Common Examples)
Restaurant	16	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Independently owned or small chain restaurants</li> <li>Big chain fast food</li> <li>One cafe/bakery; one snack and beverage bar</li> </ul>
Medical	6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Four CSIs: one hospital; one pharmacy; one animal hospital; one MRI provider</li> <li>Two small businesses that provide medical-related goods and services</li> </ul>
Lodging	5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Four small hotels, inns, motels</li> <li>One campground (likely the office)</li> </ul>
Municipal	5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Four local city facilities (e.g., city hall)</li> <li>One fire station</li> </ul>
Other Small Business	12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Not enough information to categorize</li> </ul>
Total	280	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>N/A</li> </ul>

# Supplemental Slide: Top-of-Mind End Uses by Core Segment Group

