Opinion **Dynamics**

Ameren Illinois Company Empower Communities Study

Final Report

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Table of Contents

Table of Tables

Table of Figures

1. Executive Summary

This report summarizes key findings from the 2021 Empower Communities Study that Opinion Dynamics performed on behalf of Ameren Illinois Company (AIC). AIC commissioned this study to better understand the how to best serve small businesses and community-serving institutions (CSIs)[1] in predominately non-White and/or economically challenged communities, which AIC refers to as "Empower Communities". However, the socioeconomic history, barriers, and opportunities in every community are unique. As such, AIC and the Evaluation Team chose to focus this research on deep dive into four specific Empower Communities of varying sizes, as well as different levels of racial diversity and economic challenge, and that have limited or no Market Development Initiative (MDI) partnerships: Decatur, East St. Louis, Monmouth, and an aggregation of small Southern Rural Communities (SRC). Table 1 provides a brief overview of the selected communities and Figure 1 shows their geographic locations. More information on the community selection process is available in Chapter 3.2.

Table 1. Community Selections

Community Name	Region	Urban-Rural Classification	Diverse Percentage of Population [a]	Income-Qualified Percentage of Population [a]	Number of MDI Partnerships Status
Decatur	Central	Large city	40%–97%	24%–60%	Two, limited in scope
East St. Louis	Southwestern	Small city	65%–99%	65%–90%	Four, but three are limited in scope
Monmouth	Northwestern	Small town	23%	56%	None
"Southern Rural Communities" [b]	South-Central	Rural	4%–70%	46%–78%	None

[a] Ranges are across Empower Communities zip codes in the community, where applicable.
[b] The "Southern Rural Communities" includes Pulaski County and stretches north to Anna/Jonesboro and Vienna/Cypress.

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[1] We define CSIs as any organization providing medical, spiritual, municipal, public or emergency housing, or educational services to the local community. In most cases, these are not-for-profit enterprises and/or churches. There are some exceptions, such as multifamily properties, daycares, and small trade schools, where we categorize private businesses that provide a critical community service as CSIs for analysis and comparison purposes.

Figure 1. Empower Communities in Study
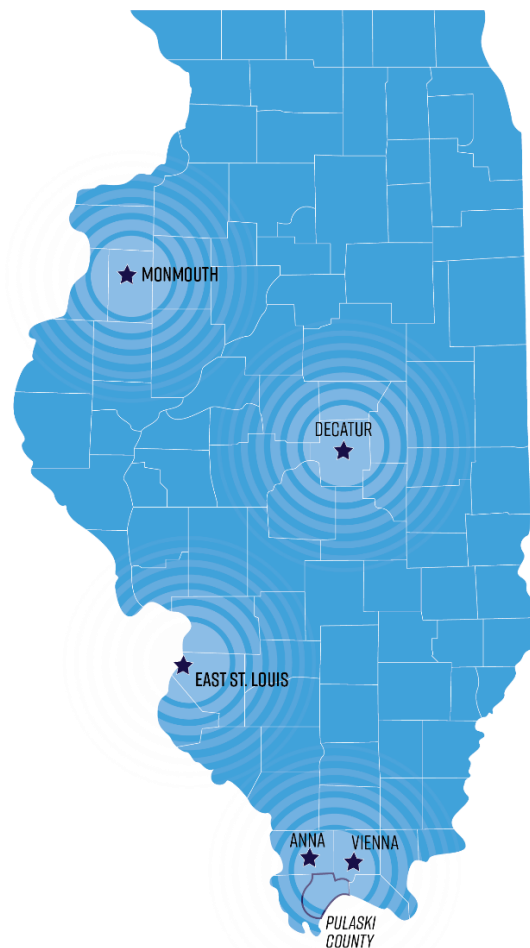
The overarching goal of this research is to find new and improved ways for AIC to reach and serve non-residential customers within these historically underserved communities. As such, this study sought to better understand their energy-related and health, comfort, and safety (HCS) needs; barriers to participating in AIC offerings; and the best ways to engage these customers to grow awareness, interest, and ultimately participation in the Business Program.

We conducted a survey with 280 small businesses and CSIs (collectively referred to as "organizations") to understand energy-related needs, barriers to energy management and AIC offering participation, and key firmographic information. To supplement survey findings with deeper, community-specific context, we conducted in-depth interviews with 21 community leaders within the Empower Communities to understand a broader view of needs, barriers, and potentially effective marketing, education, and outreach (ME&O) strategies. Community leaders included a broad range of local AIC and Leidos staff, municipal and state government officials, nonprofits, and other organizations.

Discussion with community leaders uncovered a plethora of rich information about these communities and revealed that there are unique barriers as well as partnership and community engagement strategies that warrant AIC's consideration. At the same time, the results of this study show that businesses and CSIs across

these four communities are starting their energy efficiency journey with AIC from a fundamentally similar place: they are largely unaware or unfamiliar with the AIC Business Program and, once they know about it, there is only moderate interest in participating. Upfront cost to participate (even with significantly reduced co-pays), time, and competing priorities are major barriers to getting organizations to act on the opportunity to reduce their energy costs. This is especially true for nonprofit organizations and other CSIs, who need to prioritize every bit of funding and effort they can to further their mission and services to the community.

While driving awareness and interest remains the first and most important challenge to overcome, we concluded that, once customers are engaged, AIC's Small Business Initiative offerings directly address many of the systems that surveyed organizations think use the most energy (lighting, weatherization, and HVAC); suggesting strong alignment between measure offerings and needs. Further, the overarching mission of the MDI, and the specific strategies of the Market Development Action Plan (MDAP), generally align with what community leaders believe will be most successful: find local community partners; establish presence and build AIC's reputation in the community; and play a role in economic revitalization and the development of local workforces. Each community requires unique approaches to achieve these goals, but these fundamental tenets hold across all four communities we studied.

This study also confirmed that the MDAP should continue to prioritize minority-led and women-led organizations. These organizations face more severe energy-related challenges than their counterparts on a number of levels: they report major difficulties affording their energy costs and more frequently deal with HCS issues (like thermal comfort and mold or pests). Critically, while relatively rare, they are also more likely to take more drastic steps to cope with (rather than directly reduce) their energy costs, such as not hiring the additional staff they need, laying off employees, or reducing employee compensation; strategies an organization might take to deal with operational costs that are out of their control. This latter finding highlights the potential socio-economic benefits for the Empower Communities as a whole if AIC is successful in expanding the reach of the Business Program.

Finally, CSIs, particularly those in the nonprofit, education, and religious segment group,[2] stood out as particularly primed for participation in the Business Program. Compared to small businesses, the CSIs we surveyed tend to be located in older buildings; are more inclined to think there is more they can do to upgrade equipment or manage energy use; have historically sought outside financial assistance more often; and are more interested in participating in AIC's offerings. Serving CSIs in these communities will also allow AIC to naturally target priority demographic groups, as CSIs are more likely than small businesses to be minority- or women-led organizations.

Below are overarching key findings and recommendations for improving AIC's reach into the four Empower Communities.

- ■ **Finding 1:** Organizational ownership and rental situations are not common barriers to energy upgrades or AIC offering participation for most organizations. Most respondents independently own or operate their organizations (94%); own their building or facility (71%); and occupy the entire address (80%). Decision-making power, more specifically the ability to get approval for upgrades, was also not a major barrier for most organizations, although it was more often a barrier for CSIs (48%) than small businesses (22%).

- ■ **Finding 2:** Awareness is by far the largest barrier to AIC offering participation; about four in five surveyed organizations have limited or no familiarity with AIC's Business Program. When we asked about communication preferences regarding energy efficiency offerings, surveyed organizations were fairly mixed in their preferences, though they mostly preferred paper (i.e., hard-copy) (55%) or email

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[2] This group included churches, 501(c)(3) nonprofit organizations, a few daycares and small schools, and a library.

(49%). A mailed letter (39%) was the more popular paper option, compared to a bill insert (25%). Only about a fifth of respondents (17%) preferred an in-person visit, but some community leaders emphasized that boots on the ground and quick in-person visits (e.g., to drop off a flyer) can still be an effective way, and sometimes the only reliable way, to reach organizations. Leaders also mentioned the importance of word-of-mouth and credible messengers.

- ■ Recommendation: Continue to use a mixture of ME&O tactics, with multiple touch points, including email, direct mail, in-person visits and phone calls. AIC should continue to rely on input from their Leidos Business Energy Advisors (BEAs), Small Business Energy Advisors (SBEAs), Community Relations Coordinators (CRCs), Program Allies, and other on-the-ground partners to guide their ME&O strategies for individual communities.

- ■ Recommendation: AIC could consider a mailed letter, separate from an AIC bill, focused on a specific offering, like Small Business Energy Performance (SBEP). Similarly, canvassing with a flyer about offerings may be another effective strategy in some communities. To the extent possible, we recommend targeting mailers to CSIs and minority-led organizations. Additionally, we recommend including language in AIC collateral that speaks to these organizations' missions or the needs of their community; as well as testimonials from other local organizations, or similar organizations in other communities, that have participated.

- ■ Recommendation: Continue to pursue new community partnerships in these four Empower Communities, with a broad set of organizations that serve both businesses and residents, such as nonprofits, churches, and chambers of commerce. We outline a number of community-specific ME&O and partnership opportunities at the end of the executive summary and in Chapter 6.2.

- ■ **Finding 3:** Prioritization is a major barrier for organizations, even after they are made aware of the offerings. Most surveyed organizations acknowledge a need to make some additional energy efficiency upgrades (66%), and to a lesser degree (51%) some energy management changes at their facility. However, only about a third (34%) say they are likely to make upgrades or energy management changes (31%) in the next two years. About two-thirds said managing energy costs is a mid-tier or low priority, although most surveyed organizations report that energy costs have at least a moderate impact on their operating budgets, revenue, or profits. Further, about two-thirds of survey respondents (69%) say have limited or no control over the energy costs, which possibly exacerbates this sentiment. Minority-led organizations and CSIs are statistically more likely than their counterparts to report their organization would be extremely or very likely to make upgrades in the next two years (47% and 55%, compared to 30% vs. 28%, respectively). Further, minority-led organizations were particularly interested in improving energy management (61% reporting extremely or very likely to take actions).

  - ■ Recommendation: Increase emphasis within Business Program ME&O efforts on targeting CSIs and minority-led organizations, as these organizations are generally more interested in participating in AIC programs and making changes to how they manage energy use. They are also more inclined to seek outside financial assistance to address energy costs, compared to their counterparts. As such, these organizations may be the key to expanding overall participation in the Business Program; but AIC must first increase awareness of their offerings among them.

- ■ **Finding 4:** In addition to competing priorities, cost, limited knowledge, and organizational policies are the most common barriers to making energy-efficient upgrades or energy management changes. Among surveyed organizations that were unlikely to make energy upgrades in the next two years, key barriers include financial concerns, primarily upfront cost (67%); limited knowledge of energy efficiency options (55%); and organizational policy challenges, such as preference to avoid early replacement (52%). Many community leaders, including AIC BEAs and SBEAs, emphasized that even the relatively small co-pays for SBDI may be too much for organizations to afford; and that organizations often have

little time to spare to think about or participate in an AIC offering. Among those who were unlikely to make energy management changes in the next two years, simply not knowing what to do and being unable to change some equipment settings or controls (45% each) were the most common barriers. Only about a quarter (26%) said improving energy management wouldn't be worthy the inconvenience.

- ■ Recommendation: Continue to keep SBDI co-pays as low as possible to address the upfront cost hurdle to participation but seek other opportunities to overcome priority, knowledge, and time barriers. Virtual Commissioning may be part of the solution, as it is no-cost and relatively unobtrusive (involvement-wise) to organizations; identifies low- to no-cost energy management opportunities; and can then serve as a first step into a larger journey through the Small Business Initiative.

- ■ Recommendation: Emphasize the availability of various types of controls upgrades when marketing SBDI. These offerings may be of greater interest to minority-led organizations or predominately non-White communities, such as East St. Louis or certain towns in the SRC, like Mounds.

- ■ Recommendation: When marketing SBDI, highlight the convenient, turnkey nature of the offering: the organization does not need to have any starting knowledge about what needs to be done; the Program Ally and/or SBEA will guide them through all the technology and energy management solutions that are relevant to their organization; and the Program Ally handles all the paperwork.

■ **Finding 5:** The current list of eligible SBDI and Small Business Energy Performance (SBEP) measures is highly aligned with the end-uses that are top of mind for organizations. Heating (75%), cooling (74%), and lighting (71%) systems are the "big energy users" that most surveyed organizations mentioned; and weatherization (73%) was the most common energy upgrade opportunity that surveyed organizations knew could be made. About three-quarters (73%) of organizations in the nonprofit, education, and religious group mentioned kitchen and cooking equipment as a big energy user (twice as often as the other core segment groups); and, within this group, 10 of 17 churches mentioned it.

- ■ Recommendation: Continue with the core set of lighting, HVAC, and weatherization measures offered through SBDI and SBEP, as many customers know these systems use a lot of energy. AIC should consider focusing more on SBEP's weatherization offerings in their ME&O efforts in Empower Communities. In this regard, AIC is already planning a concerted effort to promote SBEP specifically within Empower Communities in 2022; and these results support that strategy.

- ■ Recommendation: Promote food service equipment upgrade offerings specifically to nonprofit organizations, small educational facilities (e.g., daycare centers), and religious organizations like churches.

■ **Finding 6:** Minority-led organizations, women-led organizations, and CSIs are more impacted by energy costs and/or energy-related HCS issues than their counterparts, justifying their prioritization in the MDAP. Minority-led organizations are statistically more likely to report that energy costs have a large or moderate impact on their on their organizations' finances compared to non-minority-led organizations (79% vs. 59%); as do CSIs (78%) compared to small businesses (60%). Across the board, both minority-led and women-led organizations are also much more likely to face significant energy-related HCS challenges, such as thermal comfort issues; mold, mildew, and pest issues; and optimal lighting or equipment safety issues.

- ■ Recommendation: Continue to prioritize minority-led organizations, women-led organizations, and CSIs more generally through the MDAP and Small Business Initiative. AIC has set aside some limited funding in the past to waive co-pays for SBDI for minority-led organizations and several types of CSIs but should consider whether it could expand its current definition of CSIs that qualify.

■ Recommendation: The Empower Communities index should continue to prioritize communities with relatively large populations of non-White and income qualified residents, as these communities are likely to also include relatively large numbers of minority-led organizations and CSIs.

■ Recommendation: Include non-residential ownership demographics in the Empower Communities index, focused on minority-led and women-led organizations. Alternatively, create a non-residential version of the Empower Communities index that specifically informs Business Program targeting. The proposed small business general population survey for 2022 may present an opportunity to identify concentrations of women- and minority-led organizations; and/or supplement existing census data on these groups.

We present key conclusions and briefly summarize recommendations specific to each community in the table below. See Chapter 6.2 for more detailed recommendations.

Table 2. Summary of Community-Specific Conclusions and Recommendations

Key Conclusions	Recommendations (Abridged)
Decatur has plentiful opportunities for growing Business Program participation: it is one of the largest cities in AIC's territory but less than a fifth (14%) of business customers in Decatur have participated in an AIC Initiative. Community leader–identified barriers to participation are consistent with research findings from across the energy efficiency industry: time, knowledge, upfront cost, and in some cases skepticism about the offerings present the largest barriers. Compared to other communities included in the study, however, Decatur leaders placed greater emphasis on being "too busy" to participate. This suggests that time constraints may be a particularly acute barrier for businesses in Decatur, and larger cities in general, with relatively faster-paced customer traffic and more intense business competition. Leaders emphasized building trust, careful attention to the timing of engagement (i.e., avoiding rush hours), and establishing a presence at Decatur Chamber of Commerce events as keys to successful engagement in the community.	▪ Business Program messaging should emphasize convenience, the ease of participation, and/or concierge-like elements of offerings. ▪ Consider ways to increase word-of-mouth marketing. ▪ Expand AIC's partnership or involvement with the Decatur Regional Chamber of Commerce. ▪ Explore partnership opportunities with the Economic Development Corporation of Decatur-Macon County.
East St. Louis has perhaps the most challenged business community among the four Empower Communities in the study but may also present the greatest opportunity to reach CSIs and minority-led organizations eager to participate in AIC offerings. There are many nonprofits and educational facilities operating in the community; and leaders noted that churches, as well as sororities and fraternities, play influential roles in the community. The major historical socio-economic challenges in the city, combined with many old, abandoned, or decaying buildings ripe for renovation, make the upfront costs of upgrades a particularly strong barrier for this community. Despite the potential demand for AIC offerings among many of the organizations in East St. Louis, there is also a critical supply issue: leaders mentioned the city lacks a qualified local energy workforce; and about half (49%) of surveyed East St. Louis organizations said that had difficulty finding qualified contractors. Despite significant struggles, there is a strong sense of community and hope for the future in East St. Louis. Leaders told us the city is undergoing a concerted economic revitalization effort, with many	▪ Consider increasing the number of SBDI mini grants available specifically to East St. Louis organizations. ▪ Pursue partnerships with faith-based (e.g., religious-affiliated nonprofits, churches) and education-focused organizations. ▪ Consider opportunities to increase the size of scholarships to students from East St. Louis through the MDI; or other ways to help grow the local energy workforce. ▪ Explore the benefits of partnerships with well-known local

Key Conclusions	Recommendations (Abridged)
incubators and startup accelerators, and they saw opportunities for AIC to be a part of that future by supporting new small businesses and helping to build a local energy workforce.	fraternities or sororities, for example, the Delta Sigma Theta Sorority – East St. Louis Chapter. ▪ Identify and invest in incubator spaces or startup accelerators to help revitalize the East St. Louis community.
Monmouth is a small college town that leaders said is in the upswing of recovery, pulling itself out of historical socio-economic challenges related to the closure of the Maytag plant (previously one of the town's largest employers) and major food insecurity issues. This recovery is supported by a growing immigrant population attracted to big local employers, like Smithfield. Leaders emphasized several strategies they think are especially important in a small town: establish local presence; identify a well-known individual who can provide credible information on AIC offerings; meet people where they are at, such as downtown and the local football games; and encourage word-of-mouth promotion. There are currently no MDI partners in Monmouth. As such, getting a foothold in this community through a few local organizations should be a high priority for the MDAP.	▪ Consider messaging that connects the spirit of economic revitalization and growth in Monmouth with energy efficiency upgrades. ▪ Consider ways to increase word-of-mouth marketing. ▪ Expand the use of non–English language advertisements and promotion, prioritizing Spanish, French, and possibly multiple Chin languages. ▪ Focus "out-of-home/business" ME&O (i.e., visual advertisement found outside of the home or business, like billboards, signage, or booths) in areas of high resident traffic, such as the Downtown Square or Monmouth College Stadium. ▪ Explore partnership opportunities with the Jamieson Community Center.
The SRC, like much of Southern Illinois, is a tapestry of diverse circumstances and needs. From the larger, relatively more prosperous, and predominately White towns of Anna and Vienna to the smaller, poorer, and predominately Black or Hispanic villages in Pulaski County, this region defies a one-size-fits-all solution. However, a few cross-cutting challenges and opportunities weave the community together: the region lacks a qualified workforce in many industries, as younger generations leave the area; there is a feeling of disconnectedness with the rest of Illinois; and roughly half the population is income qualified. There are currently no MDI partnerships in the SRC, and our survey found that familiarity with AIC offerings was lower among SRC respondents than for any other community. According to leaders, this is driven by a "Swiss cheese" patchwork of electric co-operatives in the region, making it unclear where to get support; the lack of AIC Program Allies (but not local contractors); and de-prioritization of ME&O efforts in widespread and less populated areas (like Pulaski County) in favor of more densely packed communities with more businesses.	▪ Avoid a one-size-fits-all approach to the SRC. ▪ Recruit the local contractor workforce into the AIC Program Ally network. ▪ Explore partnerships opportunities with two regional organizations, One Shawnee and the Southern Five Regional Planning District. ▪ Explore partnership opportunities with Shawnee Community College. ▪ Focus on institutional upgrade efforts in Anna and Vienna,

Key Conclusions	Recommendations (Abridged)
	particularly homeless and women's shelters.
	▪ Consider strategies and promotions at local schools. One leader mentioned that school districts, not cities, villages, or townships, comprise the most cohesive type of "community" in some parts of the SRC.

2. Introduction

This report summarizes key findings from the 2021 Empower Communities Study that Opinion Dynamics performed on behalf of Ameren Illinois Company (AIC). AIC commissioned this study to better understand the how to best serve small businesses and CSIs in four predominately non-White and/or economically challenged communities, which AIC refers to as "Empower Communities": Decatur, East St. Louis, Monmouth, and an aggregation of small Southern Rural Communities (SRC) (see Figure 2). The overarching goal of this research is to find new and improved ways for AIC to reach and serve non-residential customers within these historically underserved communities. As such, this study sought to better understand their energy-related and HCS needs; barriers to participating in AIC offerings; and the best ways to engage these customers to grow awareness, interest, and ultimately participation in the Business Program.

2.1 Background on AIC Small Business Energy Efficiency Offerings

AIC has served its small business customers through its energy efficiency portfolio since the inception of the portfolio in 2008, albeit as part of generally targeted "non-residential" programs only. Over time, AIC has recognized that small business customers are a difficult-to-serve customer segment with unique needs compared to larger non-residential customers and has increased programmatic focus on these customers over time. AIC piloted a small business direct install (SBDI) offering in Program Year 5 (June 2012–May 2013), which later became a stand-alone program under the auspices of the Illinois Power Agency (IPA) that ran for four additional years.[3,4] SBDI primarily focused on direct-install lighting replacements, and over time additional IPA programs became available to serve other end uses with varying degrees of success.[5,6,7]

With the passage of the Future Energy Jobs Act (FEJA), many of AIC's largest non-residential customers, previously the primary targets of AIC's nonresidential offerings, became ineligible for its electric programs in June 2017. At the same time, AIC's electric energy efficiency goals also became more aggressive due to this legislation. As such, AIC recognized it would need to acquire significantly more savings from its small business customers to meet its goals under the new policy framework instituted by FEJA. In response, AIC developed and implemented the SBDI channel of the Business Program's Standard Initiative. SBDI immediately became a major component of the AIC portfolio and represented over 20% of achieved electric savings in the most recently evaluated program year; a dramatic increase from pre-FEJA programs.[8]

Looking forward, the AIC 2022–2025 Energy Efficiency and Demand Response Plan includes distinct offerings under a new Small Business Initiative, which AIC separated from the existing Standard Initiative. This Initiative includes:

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[3]Opinion Dynamics. *Impact and Process Evaluation of the 2013 Illinois Power Agency Small Business Direct Install Program*. March 12, 2015. https://ilsag.s3.amazonaws.com/IPA_PY6_SBDI_Report_FINAL_2015-03-12.pdf

[4] IPA programs ceased to exist after May 31, 2017.

[5] Opinion Dynamics. *Impact and Process Evaluation of the 2015 Illinois Power Agency Small Business Refrigeration Program*. December 16, 2017.
https://ilsag.s3.amazonaws.com/Ameren_IPA_PY8_Small_Business_Refrigeration_Evaluation_Report_FINAL_2016-12-16.pdf

[6] Opinion Dynamics. *Impact and Process Evaluation of the 2016 Illinois Power Agency Demand Based Ventilation Fan Control Program*. December 12, 2017. https://ilsag.s3.amazonaws.com/AIC-IPA_PY9_SB_Demand_Based_Ventilation_Report_FINAL_2017-12-12.pdf

[7] Opinion Dynamics. *Impact and Process Evaluation of the 2016 Illinois Power Agency Small Business Linear LED Lighting Program*. December 12, 2017.
https://ilsag.s3.amazonaws.com/AIC-IPA_PY9_Small_Business_Linear_Lighting_Report_FINAL_2017-12-12.pdf

[8] Opinion Dynamics. *Ameren Illinois Company 2021 Integrated Impact Evaluation Report*. Draft. March 15, 2022. https://ilsag.s3.amazonaws.com/2021-AIC-Integrated-Impact-Evaluation-Report-DRAFT-2022-03-15.docx

- **SBDI:** The SBDI channel provides small commercial customers with rapidly deployable electric energy saving opportunities by offering a free energy assessment and a simplified process for installing a limited set of rebated measures, focused primarily on lighting and refrigeration opportunities. SBDI incentives are paid directly to AIC Business Program allies, which improves the customer's experience through a streamlined transaction at the time of installation with minimal out-of-pocket costs. Many projects are fully funded through SBDI incentives and require no out-of-pocket contribution by the customer. Further, AIC offers a limited number of "mini-grants" that cover the entire SBDI co-pay for nonprofit organizations, minority-owned businesses, and other types of high need small businesses on a case-by-case basis (e.g., based on community partner referral, specific target segments).

- **SBEP:** The SBEP channel of the Small Business Initiative provides small business customers with additional opportunities for energy savings through a more comprehensive set of measures, including building envelope and HVAC improvements.

In addition to the Small Business Initiative, the Retro-Commissioning Initiative includes one component that is a potential fit for small business customers:

- **Virtual Commissioning:** Virtual Commissioning remotely targets small and medium business customers to support low- and no-cost energy-saving measures. Through Virtual Commissioning, implementation staff use their internal software to remotely complete an initial analysis of advanced metering infrastructure (AMI) data to identify prospective participants and then specific opportunities for low- and no-cost energy-saving improvements at the customers' facilities. These opportunities commonly include HVAC system modifications and lighting scheduling adjustments. Energy advisors then contact potential participants to share the results of the analysis, confirm the energy-saving opportunities, and verify facility characteristics. After participants implement the recommended changes, energy savings are analyzed using AMI data.

Although AIC primarily markets Small Business Initiative offerings to the customers included in this study, these customers also typically qualify for participation in other Business Program offerings, such as the Standard and Custom Initiatives. Participation in these offerings has historically been challenging for smaller non-residential customers; however, due to the higher cost of entry and additional resources needed to identify and complete energy savings projects. During the upcoming program cycle, small business customers could also potentially benefit from midstream incentives for lighting, HVAC, and food service equipment provided through the Midstream Initiative, although some barriers are likely to exist that make participation more challenging for this specific segment.

2.2   Background on Market Development Initiative

AIC also launched the MDI in 2018 to promote new economic and energy efficiency opportunities for local and diverse individuals and businesses in Empower Communities. The three core goals of the MDI are (1) to increase participation in energy efficiency offerings among those who have never participated; (2) support local and diverse candidates for energy efficiency jobs; and (3) grow and expand local and diverse energy efficiency businesses. The MDAP seeks to incorporate the MDI's goals specifically into AIC energy efficiency and demand response portfolio. One of the key goals of the MDAP to increase awareness of and participation in the Business and Residential Program, with special focus on the Income Qualified and Small Business Initiatives. MDAP efforts include supplemental no-cost energy efficiency offerings such as free kits of energy efficiency products; incentive enhancements (such as covering co-payments); ME&O campaigns; and partnerships with local leaders, nonprofits, and other community organizations.

2.3   Research Objectives

The specific goals of the Empower Communities Study were to answer the following research questions:

■ What energy-related issues and needs do small businesses and CSIs within the selected Empower Communities have? Which of these issues could the AIC Business Program, the MDI, or new MDI Partners potentially address?

■ What sorts of needs, energy-related or non-energy-related, do small businesses and CSIs have that must be addressed before or in tandem with energy efficiency upgrades? Do the current MDI partners offer these services, or would AIC need to seek new partnerships?

■ What barriers to participation in AIC Business Program or MDI offerings, as well as to energy management in general, do small businesses and CSIs face?

■ What possible ME&O strategies (e.g., marketing tactics, MDI partnerships, credible messengers, messaging strategies) do community leaders suggest would encourage Business Program and MDI participation among small businesses and community-serving institutions?

■ How well aligned are MDI strategies and the current Empower Communities definition with the needs of small businesses and community-serving institutions in Empower Communities? Given the needs of and barriers facing these communities, are there other strategies or partnerships the MDI should consider?

Figure 2. Empower Communities in Study
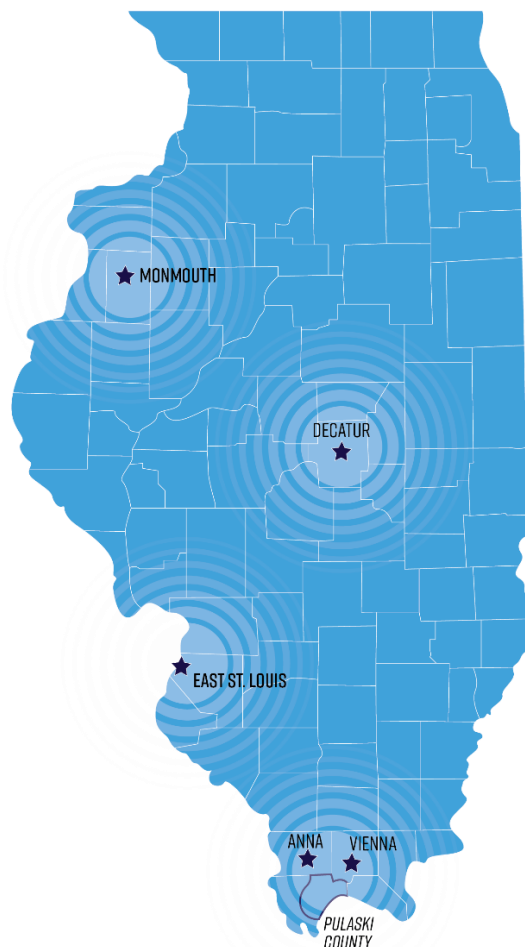
2.4   Community Overviews

This section provides background information on each of the communities we selected for this study.

2.4.1   Decatur
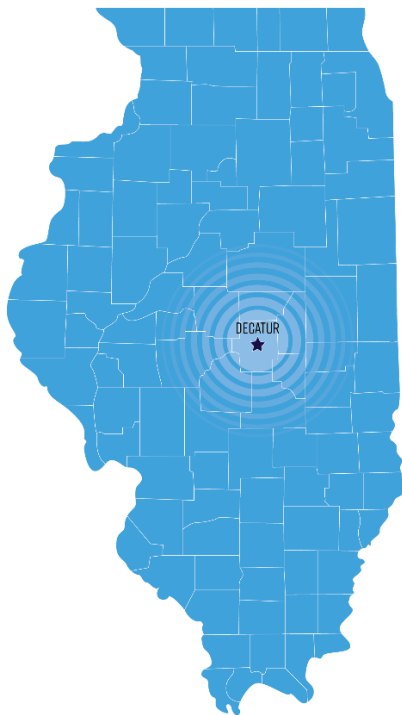
Decatur is a large city in central Illinois. There are four Empower Community zip codes in Decatur (62523, 62526, 62522, and 62521), which encompass Central Decatur and its surrounding areas, such as the West End and downtown. While Decatur is overall not highly diverse (most of the city is more than 70% White), between 40% and 50% of the households in most parts of the city are income-qualified. Central Decatur (zip code 62523), however, is a majority Black and/or African American community and extremely economically disadvantaged (97% income-qualified). One community leader interviewee mentioned that there is diversity in Decatur, but it is not acknowledged or celebrated enough. They highlighted that there are over 20 languages represented in Decatur Public Schools, with English and Spanish as the two major languages spoken.

There is a large business community in Decatur, including many small businesses and several very large companies (e.g., Caterpillar), which attracts many employees who commute into Decatur from surrounding areas, such as Bloomington-Normal, Champaign, and Springfield.

Community leaders described Decatur as tight-knit, diverse, and welcoming, among other terms (Figure 3). AIC staff reported that Decatur is the most metropolitan area they work with and, as such, the words diverse and "city-like" also came to mind. One leader said that the view of Decatur as a blue-collar community was a misperception because the community includes more white-collar jobs than one might expect.

Figure 3. Words Used by Leaders to Describe Decatur

Decatur community leaders also shared additional characteristics they felt made the community unique, including the following:

- Employment and finding qualified staff have been a challenge for this community, especially during COVID-19. Decatur has one of the higher unemployment rates in the state and one leader reported that Decatur is experiencing population decline; and job openings have been high. Difficulty hiring qualified staff existed prior to COVID-19 but has been worsened by the pandemic. Another interviewee discussed how the manufacturing segment has always struggled with employees, given high turnover rates even before COVID-19.

- CSIs serve many families that are classified as Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed (ALICE®).[9] Also known as the "working poor", these families are above the federal poverty line but

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[9] "Meet Alice®" *United for Alice*. Last modified March 28, 2022. https://www.unitedforalice.org/.

struggle to afford basic necessities such as housing, childcare, food, transportation, health care, and technology. These are households that could potentially qualify as "moderate income" participants in the AIC's Income Qualified Initiative (i.e., 201% to 300% of the federal poverty line according to household size), and as such may be eligible to receive no-cost and/or heavily discounted energy upgrades for their homes.

■ One leader noted that the cost of doing business is reportedly high in Macon County due to business taxes, which they noted was a deterrent for businesses to come to Decatur and reduces disposable income for business owners in the community.

There are very few MDI Partners in the area, which is one reason AIC is especially interested in strategies to expand their engagement with this community. AIC has an in-kind partnership (i.e., AIC provides marketing collateral to the partners and the partner provides project referrals; AIC does not provide any funding) with Decatur Homework Hangout, which provides afterschool tutoring and mentorship to local youth as well as meals for families on weekends. AIC also sponsored an intern at the Empowerment Opportunity Center, which provides a wide range of services to Decatur residents, including energy services, early childhood services, and community services focused on seniors, employment, and housing.

2.4.2   East St. Louis

East St. Louis is a small city in southwestern Illinois, which borders the state of Missouri. All six of the zip codes in East St. Louis are top ranked Empower Communities zip codes (62201, 62203, 62204, 62205, 62206, and 62207). There are no other cities in AIC territory that rank as highly. East St. Louis is very close to the major metropolitan area of St. Louis, Missouri but is geographically and physically separated by state lines and the Mississippi River. The vast majority of households in East St. Louis are non-White (more than 95% non-White in most zip codes) and between 65% and 90% of households, depending on the zip code, are income qualified. Much of the population is Black and/or African American.
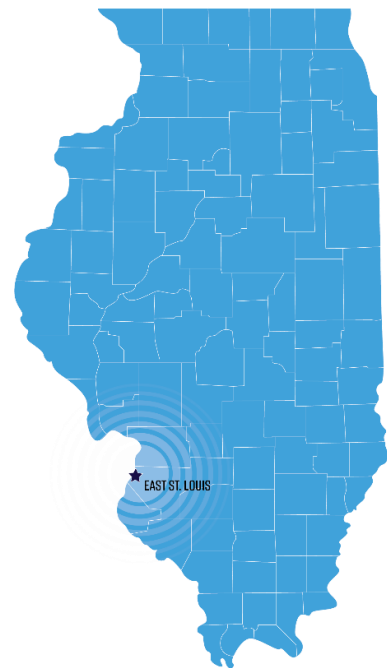
Figure 4. Words Used by Leaders to Describe East St. Louis

According to leaders, there is not a large business community in East St. Louis; however, there is a higher proportion of nonprofits than in other areas of the state. Residents travel out of town for work to St. Louis, Bellville, Fairview Heights, Collinsville, or Edwardsville, all within a 30-mile radius. Some residents of nearby Fairmont do commute into East St. Louis for employment. Those who work in-town are employed at mom-and-pop stores or the major employers such as School District 189, the state government, and Southern Illinois University (SIU).

Community leaders described East. St. Louis as proud, resilient, and low-income, among other terms (Figure 4). Community members have a sense of pride for their city and see themselves as resilient. This pride and resilience are highlighted in their slogan, "City of Champions," which is a reference to having multiple Olympic

athletes born and/or raised in East St. Louis and overcoming challenges. Leaders shared that East St. Louis, while full of potential, does not have a thriving business community. They mentioned that the town has been abandoned by businesses for a long time and that the city feels repressed. The businesses that exist there tend to be small restaurants and shops.

Additional characteristics of East St. Louis interviewees felt made the community unique included:

■ Religion has a large influence on the community of East St. Louis. One leader mentioned that almost all of the nonprofit organizations in the community are religiously affiliated; specifically, many are affiliated with the Catholic church.

■ Many good and services are limited in this community. East. St. Louis is a food desert, with only one grocery store, which has high prices compared to other surrounding areas. While there is urgent care available, there is no hospital in the community. As such, residents are traveling out of East. St. Louis city limits for most goods and services.

AIC is looking to solidify its local presence in East St. Louis. AIC has relationships with many community organizations in the area, but there are not many MDI partners; and most of those partnerships are not extensive (typically limited to providing marketing materials; called "in-kind" partnerships). Current partners include Call for Help (in-kind partnership), Sitton Energy Services (AIC funded two internships), and St. Clair County (a funded outreach partnership). Senior Services Plus is the most engaged MDI Partner in the city, acting as an implementation partner for a number of pilot offerings, and one explored thoroughly in the 2021 MDI Partnership Study.

2.4.3   Monmouth
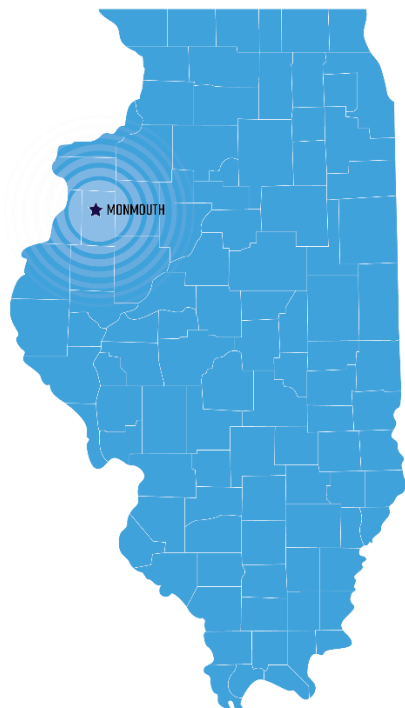
Monmouth is a small town in northwestern Illinois. The single zip code in Monmouth (61462) is an Empower Community, ranked at 0.9. Monmouth is predominately White and over half the households in Monmouth (55%) are income-qualified. We received conflicting reports on the diversity of the community. Some leaders observed a significant Latino and Asian workforce in the town but stated the residents are non-diverse. Other leaders noted that the most prevalent minority groups were Latino and East African. One interviewee explained there is a large, diverse immigrant population in part due to a hog processing plant that employs approximately 1,300 workers, many of whom are international recruits mainly from East Africa and Myanmar. These workers have students in the local school system and as a result of the large immigrant population, there are just under 30 different languages spoken by students in Monmouth schools. The most commonly spoken languages in the community are English, Spanish, French, and one or more Chin languages. According to one leader, approximately 40% of the school in Monmouth is non-White, with residents primarily identifying as Hispanic and/or East African.

Despite Monmouth being an economically depressed town following the closure of the Maytag plant, the town is growing quickly. Community leaders reported that people primarily come into Monmouth for work, rather than leave the town for work. Some people travel upwards of

40–60 miles per day to work in Monmouth, likely to work at the large employers (Smithfield, Americold, Monmouth College, and the Order of St. Francis (OSF) Holy Family Medical Center).

Leaders described Monmouth as diverse, caring, and industrious among other terms (Figure 5). One leader noted there were not a lot of other rural towns in Illinois with as much diversity as Monmouth, in part from the large immigrant population. Residents of Monmouth are seen as industrious because of their values around hard work, originating with their town's history with manufacturing.

Figure 5. Words Used by Leaders to Describe Monmouth

caring
industrious
downtown square
diversity
latino

Additional characteristics of Monmouth that stood out as unique included:

■ Residents view their Downtown Square as a point of pride in their town. The Monmouth Downtown Square includes restaurants, as well as public service buildings, such as city hall and the library. Additionally, Downtown Square is one of the more highly trafficked areas of Monmouth.

"There's not many areas or communities that I've called on where it's a one way around a beautiful square and businesses, the library, city hall, everything's right there on the square."

■ Monmouth College is a small liberal arts private university located within Monmouth. One leader noted that this college is known throughout the state as one of the most prestigious colleges in Illinois and thus is a unique asset in the community. Over 900 students from 28 states and 21 countries are enrolled at Monmouth College.

■ Seven years ago, Monmouth had ones of the highest food insecurity rates in the country. One leader said that approximately 75% of families qualified for food assistance at that time. Now, in 2022, Monmouth has completely rebounded and has one of the lowest rates of food insecurity in the country.

There are no MDI Partners in Monmouth, but AIC noted that Monmouth was a large source of participation for the new SBDI co-pay grants, which waives co-pays for minority and disadvantaged businesses.

2.4.4   Southern Rural Communities

The SRC is an aggregation of several small rural towns concentrated in south-central Illinois, including all of Pulaski County and then stretching north to the communities of Anna and Vienna/Cypress. This region includes ten Empower Communities zip codes, ranked between 0.7 and 0.9. The region has mixed levels of diversity. Cypress, Anna, and Grand Chain are at least 90% White, while the southern-most towns (the "deep south;" such as Mounds, Mound City, and Pulaski) are majority Black and African American or Hispanic. There is a particularly large Hispanic population in Pulaski County, many of whom work on farms and orchards in the area and do not speak English. Between 45% and 65% of the households in the SRC are income qualified, depending on the zip code, with the most income-qualified households being in the deep south communities of Ullin, Mound City, and Villa Ridge.

Businesses in this region concentrate in Mounds, Anna, and Vienna. Agriculture and mining comprise a majority jobs in the SRC.

Overall, this region was described by interviewees as unique due to the natural beauty of the area, including the nearby Shawnee National Forest. Leaders described the SRC as tight-knit, rural, and poor, among other phrases (Figure 6). Although the region may be tight-knit in part due to the "small town America" feel, some leaders described it as disconnected from the rest of Illinois in that some residents feel more aligned with Kentucky, Tennessee, or southeast Missouri.

Figure 6. Words Us... ...rs to Describe...

Additional characteristics of SRC that stood out as unique included:

- Southern Illinois has an abundance of energy cooperatives and alternative energy providers. One interviewee described how most customers should know who their utility is, but AIC staff still receive calls from people who are not AIC customers. The confusion customers may experience is highlighted by this quote:

    "If you look at the map, it's like a Swiss cheese. Ameren may have 60% of it, but that other 40% is just little pops here and there. So, I mean, you could literally drive down the road and there'd be an Ameren customer, and then you drive another 100 yards, and its co-op for two miles, and then it's back into Ameren territory."

- Reliable access to internet is an issue for AIC customers in this area. There is still a reliance on satellite services, which can be especially challenging for businesses.

- Local identity was reported to be tied to the local school districts. One interviewee explained how school affiliation is strong and therefore many residents identified with their local school district.

The rural southern areas, particularly the "deep south," are historically underserved by AIC's Business and Residential Programs; and there is also the least progress with the MDI in SRC: there are currently no MDI partners in the region.
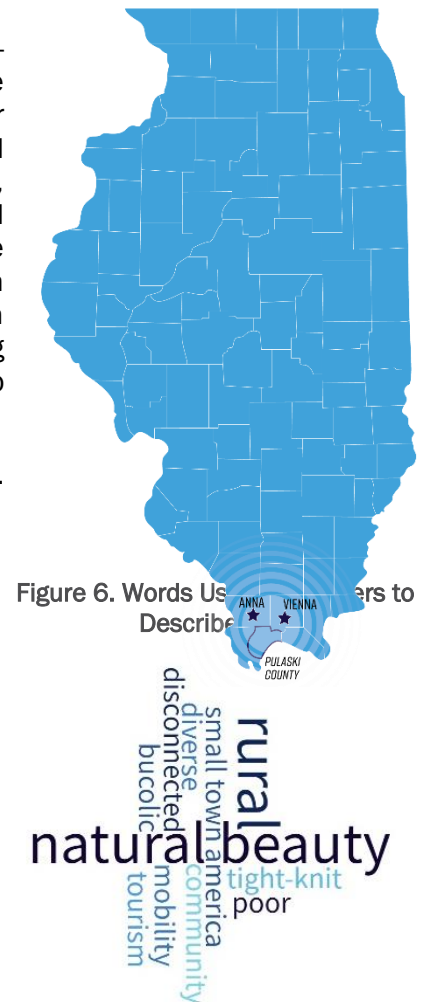
2.5   Report Organization

Chapter 3 provides summarizes research methods; Chapters 4 and 5 provide an overview of survey respondents and detailed results, respectively; and Chapter 6 summarizes the key findings, conclusions, and recommendations. Appendix A through Appendix C provide more detail on survey response rate and the data collections instruments.

3. Methods

Table 3 provides a brief description of each research task, with further detail directly following the table.

Table 3. Empower Communities Study Research Activities

Activity	Details
Kickoff Discussion and Collaboration	Collaborative discussions with AIC and Leidos staff to review and refine study objectives; understand data availability to support the study; develop data collection instruments; and identify initial community leader interviewees.
Community Selection	Development of a shortlist of potential targets by mapping existing data on Empower Communities, AIC business customer data, and other census data. AIC used this shortlist to discuss internally with other stakeholders and finalize Empower Communities selection.
Community Leader Interviews	In-depth interviews with 21 community leaders within selected Empower Communities to understand a broader view of needs, barriers, and potentially effective ME&O strategies. Community leaders included a broad range of local AIC and Leidos staff, municipal and state government officials, nonprofits, and other organizations.
Business Customer Survey	Surveys of small businesses and CSIs within selected Empower Communities to understand energy related needs, barriers to energy management and AIC offering participation, and key firmographic information. We surveyed 280 respondents total, between 37 and 139 in each target Empower Community.

3.1 Kickoff Discussion and Collaboration

We facilitated several discussions with AIC and Leidos staff involved in the Business Program and the MDI in the early stages of research and data collection instrument development. The primary goal of these interviews was to review and refine research objectives and ensure, where possible, that this research supported the goals AIC outlined in the MDAP. For example, we used these discussions to solidify the study's definition of Empower Communities to aid with community selection and clarify target non-residential customer types for study. We also used these conversations to identify efforts made to date by AIC to identify Empower Communities and what data was available to support survey sampling and community selection. We also worked with AIC and Leidos staff to identify which other organizations within AIC (e.g., Community Relations) and implementation team members (e.g., Business Energy Advisors [BEAs]), would be valuable contributors to the community leader interviews. We also used these discussions to align the study, where feasible, with the goals of the MDAP.

3.2 Community Selection

We mapped all of AIC's business customers onto the state of Illinois, along with the Empower Communities data, historical AIC Business Program participation data, and other census data. The resulting map enabled us to both visualize and analyze the communities eligible for the study and to develop a shortlist of communities to consider. We then worked closely with AIC and Leidos staff who are involved in the MDI and Business Program to review the data and make the final selections.

The specific data sources we used for this analysis included:

- AIC business customer data, which included key customer characteristics (e.g., estimated segment and customer class), historical participation in the Business Program, and physical addresses;

- Empower Communities data, which is a set of zip codes AIC developed in partnership with the Champaign County Regional Planning Commission (CCRPC). This data ranks AIC service territory zip codes from 0 to 1, where '1.0' is the most disadvantaged. The ranking is based on the percentage of customers who are income qualified and/or diverse (i.e., non-White). AIC defines Empower Communities as zip codes with ranks from 0.7 to 1.0; and

- US Department of Agriculture Rural-Urban Commuting Area (RUCA) data,[10] which classifies population density and urbanization using 2010 census data at the zip code level.

We used this data to develop a shortlist of 25 potential communities as follows:

1. We excluded any zip codes with an Empower Communities index lower than 0.7.

2. We excluded communities that did not have enough AIC business customers to conduct data collection and could not be justifiably combined with other nearby communities. We determined the minimum number of businesses based on estimated survey response rates and our desired number of survey completions. To account for data cleaning (i.e., assuming up to a third of the sample could be removed during cleaning), we sought communities, or groups of communities, with at least 700 non-participant businesses. Communities with fewer than 700 business were still be considered if they could be feasibly grouped together; for example, they are located within a reasonable commute to a nearby target community and/or if the community was somewhat dependent on another nearby community for goods and services.

3. We created a list of the remaining communities, divided into geographic sizes (i.e., urban-rural) and regions of Illinois, and ranked them by their levels of diversity, income qualifications, and Empower Communities index. The urban-rural classifications we used were rural, small town, small city, and large city.[11] The Illinois regions include the northwestern, north-central, central, southwestern, south-central, and eastern parts of Illinois.

The resulting shortlist included our recommendations of potential communities to include based on a mixture of geographic size and region, racial/ethnic diversity, and economic impoverishment. We also provided AIC with information on the percentage of electric-only, gas-only, and combo customers in each community. We then facilitated discussions with AIC staff familiar with the MDI and Business Program to vet the options and better understand AIC's historical experiences with these communities, as well as their priorities in those communities. AIC and Leidos staff then gathered feedback from other internal stakeholders to finalize their recommendations for the four communities.

Table 4 below list the four communities that Opinion Dynamics, AIC, and Leidos selected through this process, as well as several key metrics we considered. More background information on these communities is available in Section 2.4 above.

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[10] US Department of Agriculture (USDA). "Rural-Urban Commuting Area Codes." *USDA Economic Research Service.* Last modified August 17, 2020. https://www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/rural-urban-commuting-area-codes.aspx

[11] Rural communities have populations less than 3,000; small towns have populations from 3,000 to less than 15,000; small cities have populations from 15,000 to 50,000; and large cities have populations more than 50,000.

Table 4. Community Selections

Community Name	Region	Urban-Rural Classification	Final Number of Business Customers in Sample	Diverse Percentage of Population [a]	Income-Qualified Percentage of Population [a]
Decatur	Central	Large city	1,866	40%–97%	24%–60%
East St. Louis	Southwestern	Small city	1,226	65%–99%	65%–90%
Monmouth	Northwestern	Small town	431	23%	56%
"Southern Rural Communities" [b]	South-Central	Rural	605	4%–70%	46%–78%

[a] Ranges are across Empower Communities zip codes in the community, where applicable.
[b] The "Southern Rural Communities" includes Pulaski County and stretches north to Anna/Jonesboro and Vienna/Cypress.

3.3   Community Leader Interviews

We conducted in-depth interviews with leaders in the four Empower Communities who are knowledgeable about and/or provide public or not-for-profit services within the selected communities. We began the interviews by discussing the communities overall, such as what makes the community unique; key socioeconomic challenges; demographics and business community trends; and the availability of CSIs (e.g., medical, educational, and social services) in the community. We then discussed energy-related topics, which included how small businesses and CSIs in the communities think about energy savings, the main barriers they face with improving energy management, and identify opportunities for AIC to reach and support these organizations through their energy efficiency offerings. For more detail on the topics and questions we discussed with community leaders, please see Appendix C.

We identified and recruited community leaders through "snowball" sampling approach, where we asked interviewees to suggest additional leaders for the research team to contact. We ultimately conducted 13 interviews with 21 community leaders (occasionally, there were multiple interviewees present at the interview) from September through November 2021. The leaders we spoke with represented a wide variety of organizations, roles, and services in the communities. We began with group interviews with AIC CRCs and Leidos BEAs and/or SBEAs; all of whom operate within the target communities. We then leveraged their network of contacts to reach non-AIC-affiliated community leaders, such as chambers of commerce, municipal leaders, state representatives, and local nonprofit organizations. Table 5 provides a detailed list of organizations and the number of leaders we interviewed in each community.

Table 5. Organizations Interviewed by Community

Interviewee Organization by Community	Count of Interviewee
Decatur	6
AIC and Leidos Staff	4
Economic Development Corporation	1
Decatur Chamber of Commerce	1
East St. Louis	4
AIC and Leidos Staff	2
Greater East St. Louis Community Fund	1
Jackie Joyner Kersee Foundation	1

Interviewee Organization by Community	Count of Interviewee
Monmouth	**4**
AIC and Leidos Staff	2
Jamieson Community Center	1
Monmouth City Hall	1
SRC	**7**
AIC and Leidos Staff	3
Rep Patrick Windhorst Office/One Shawnee	2
Anna City Hall	1
Southern Five Planning District	1
Grand Total	**21**

3.4　　Business Customer Survey

We conducted a survey in each of the four communities to collect data from small businesses and CSIs about their energy usage concerns and priorities; energy-using equipment; perceived opportunities to reduce energy use and any actions already taken; and barriers to energy upgrades, energy management, and participation in AIC offerings.

Sample Development and Fielding

The lists of business (i.e., non-residential) customers we received from AIC included contact information such as the non-residential customer's name, address, phone number, and, if available, an email address. In addition, lists also included the fuel type and rate code, and whether the business/organization had previously participated in an AIC energy efficiency offering.

To develop the survey sample, we excluded:

1. Any duplicated customers names, addresses, phone numbers, and email addresses; any businesses/organizations without a either phone number or an email address on record;

2. Any billboard, cable boxes, cell phone towers, and other non-businesses/organizations we could identify;

3. Any multifamily properties (e.g., apartment complexes, condo buildings, etc.) we could identify; and

4. All or most customers with DS3-B, DS-4, DS-5, GDS-3, GDS-4, or GDS-5 rate codes unless they could potentially be a qualifying customer for the Small Business Initiative based on the name and/or an online lookup.[12]

As shown in Table 6, the final, cleaned contact list included over 4,000 customers. We used a census approach for all four communities. The survey used web and phone data collection modes. All customers with an email address on record were sent up to five emails that included a link to the survey and other important information about the study. We also called nonrespondents to the email outreach up to three times as a reminder to complete the web survey or to give them the option to complete it on the phone. We called the customers

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[12] The Small Business Initiative focuses on AIC customers in the DS-2, DS3-A and/or GDS-2 customer delivery rate codes. Certain DS-1 (farms) and DS-5 rate code customers may be eligible on a case-by-case basis but are not solicited by the Initiative.

without an email address up to five times to complete the survey over the phone or, if the respondent preferred and provided an email address, were sent an email to complete the survey online. We fielded the survey from November 2021 through January 2022; but calling was paused during the Thanksgiving, Christmas, and New Year holidays.

We ultimately completed 280 surveys, with a relatively even mix across survey modes (Table 6). Survey completes varied widely by community but generally scaled with community and sample size: Decatur and East St. Louis had the largest samples and largest numbers of completes; SRC and Monmouth had the smallest samples and smallest numbers of completes. We achieved a 7% response rate overall, between 5% and 9% by community.

Table 6. Summary Survey Disposition by Community

Community Name	Total Contact List	Phone Completes	Web Completes	Total Completes	Response Rate [a]
Decatur	1,866	66	73	139	7%
East St. Louis	1,226	31	30	61	5%
SRC	605	24	19	43	7%
Monmouth	431	23	14	37	9%
Total	**4,128**	**144**	**136**	**280**	**7%**

[a] American Association for Public Opinion Research (AAPOR) Response Rate 4

For more details about the survey disposition and the response rate, please refer to Appendix A.

Survey Qualification

In addition to being an AIC business customer with a DS-2, DS3-A and/or GDS-2 rate code (with some subjective exceptions for other rate codes), respondents had to meet the following three key criteria to qualify for the survey:

1. They had to be a business or organization and not a residence or other entity.

2. They had to have fewer than 500 employees and/or less than $10 million in annual revenue or operating budget, which is what the US Small Business Administration defines as a small/medium-sized business.

3. The respondent had to be involved in making management decisions about the organization. The examples we gave the respondent were, "decisions about finances, employment, clients or customers, sales and purchases, inventory, operations, maintenance, repairs or building upgrades, administration, the building or the facilities, etc."

Key Survey Analysis Definitions

We use the following terms when discussing survey respondents and results in Chapters 4 through 6:

- **Community-serving institution:** Refers to any organization providing medical, spiritual, municipal, public or emergency housing, or educational services to the local community. In most cases, these are not-for-profit enterprises and/or churches. There are some exceptions, such as multifamily properties, daycares, and small trade schools, where we categorize private businesses that provide a critical community service as CSIs for analysis and comparison purposes.

- **Organization:** Henceforth, for conciseness, we use the term "organization" to refer to small businesses and CSI survey respondents together. An objective of this research is to better understand how energy-related issues and needs of small businesses and community-serving institutions in Empower Communities vary by ownership structure, location, and business or organization type. The following section provides a summary of characteristics of the owners and administrators at surveyed organizations and the characteristics of the businesses and organizations they represent. The section also provides details on the following key organization characteristics we used looked at during analysis:

- **Core segment groups:** Based on survey responses, we identified three core segment groups with enough respondents for statistical comparison: services; retail and entertainment; and nonprofit, education, and religion. We refer to these segments as "core" segment analysis groups.

- **Women-led:** Organizations where a woman is one of the owners or lead administrators of the organization. This includes some organizations where both women and men are owners or administrators.

- **Minority-led:** Organizations where a racial minority (non-White) is one of the owners or lead administrators of the organization. This includes some organizations where both a White person and a non-White person are owners or administrators.

- **Veteran-led:** Organizations where a military veteran is one of the owners or lead administrators of the organization.

For all survey questions, we reviewed how responses varied by the above organizational characteristics and note when there are meaningful differences.

3.5   Limitations

The data and findings from this research are subject to a number of important sources of bias and analysis limitations:

- **Limited community comparison power:** The smaller communities had much fewer respondents than the larger communities, precluding statistical comparison between all communities in most cases. While we do call out some community differences, not all differences we highlighted are statistically significant at a 90% confidence level; instead, some are notable differences supported by anecdotal information only. We note this distinction when discussing findings, as applicable, for transparency. In addition, anticipating these limitations, we included the community leader interviews in part to supplement the survey findings with community-specific qualitative findings.

- **Non-response bias:** We completed surveys with 280 organizations out of a sample frame of several thousand. There may be systematic differences in characteristics or experiences between those who were willing to complete the survey and those who were not. As such, the results of the survey may have limited generalizability to the non-residential population in these communities. Data was not available to assess the potential extent of non-response bias.

- **Self-report bias:** There is the potential for respondents to feel pressure to provide what they perceive as socially desirable responses, even if that answer may not truly reflect reality. This may include, for instance, responses related to satisfaction with AIC and interest in making energy upgrades or participating in AIC's offerings. We implemented best practices in question wording throughout the survey to mitigate the impact of self-report bias as much as possible.

4. Respondent Characteristics

This chapter provides an overview of respondent characteristics as context for survey results.

4.1 Firmographics

Of the 280 organizations we surveyed, 230 (or 82%) were small businesses, and the remaining 50 (or 18%) were CSIs. Respondents represented a wide variety of non-residential segments. We asked respondents to report their business or organization type and we reviewed all 280 respondents, through online searches as necessary, to ensure the final categorization was accurate. We then organized the individual categories into groups that share potentially similar occupancy patterns, purposes in the community, or energy-using equipment; or otherwise in ways that enable meaningful analyses based on the customers the Business Program and MDI target.

Table 7 summarizes the final segment groups, total respondents in each group, and the number of small businesses and CSIs in each group. These segment groups are mutually exclusive in almost all cases; and are typically comprised entirely of either small businesses or CSIs. About half of surveyed organizations are in one of the three core segment groups with enough sample for statistical comparison, including services (19%), retail store and entertainment (16%), and nonprofit, education, and religious (14%).

Table 7. Respondent Segment Groups

Segment Group	Number of Respondents	Number of Small Businesses	Number of CSIs	Description (Most to Least Common Examples)
Core Segment Groups				
Services	52	52	0	▪ In-store services, (e.g., tax, insurance, and legal services; barber shops, salons, and massage therapy) ▪ Real estate and property management offices
Retail Store and Entertainment	45	43	2	▪ In-store goods, such as clothing stores, and auto parts ▪ Grocery stores, butcher shops ▪ Convenience store, including gas stations ▪ Entertainment and fitness venues, (e.g., theaters, gyms, and event spaces) ▪ CSIs are thrift stores associated with charities
Nonprofit, Education, and Religious	39	0	39	▪ Churches ▪ 501(c)(3) nonprofit organizations ▪ Daycares, small schools, and educational facilities, one library
Additional Segment Groups				
Supplier/ Warehouse	27	27	0	▪ Equipment and product suppliers, often including combination office/warehouses ▪ Warehouses and storage facilities
Vehicle Repair and Manufacturing	26	26	0	▪ Vehicle repair and service ▪ Heavy machinery, chemical, paint, and other types of factories and forges ▪ Digital and other printing

Segment Group	Number of Respondents	Number of Small Businesses	Number of CSIs	Description (Most to Least Common Examples)
Contractor	22	22	0	▪ Offices for trades typically provided outside of the business grounds, (e.g., HVAC contractors, janitorial, plumbers)
Housing	17	14	3	▪ Small multifamily properties (e.g., duplexes, triplexes, small apartment buildings) ▪ RV and mobile home parks (may be on-site offices) ▪ CSIs are two public housing authorities and one homeless shelter
Agriculture and Animal Husbandry	16	16	0	▪ Farms, ranches, and equestrian centers ▪ Grain and seed providers
Restaurant	16	16	0	▪ Independently owned or small chain restaurants ▪ Big chain fast food ▪ One cafe/bakery; one snack and beverage bar
Medical	6	2	4	▪ Four CSIs: one hospital; one pharmacy; one animal hospital; one MRI provider ▪ Two small businesses that provide medical-related goods and services (also categorized as retail stores or services)
Lodging	5	5	0	▪ Four small hotels, inns, motels ▪ One campground (likely the office)
Municipal	5	0	5	▪ Four local city facilities (e.g., city hall) ▪ One fire station
Other Small Business	12	12	0	Not enough information to categorize
Total	280	230	50	N/A

Note: Rows do not sum to totals because eight respondents fall into multiple segment groups. Only two of these respondents are in multiple core analysis segments and are removed from those comparisons.

4.1.1   Ownership Structure

Most of the organizations we surveyed have a high degree of independence in terms of the management of their business and the building they occupy.

- ■ Nearly all surveyed organizations (94%) are independently owned or operated, with the remaining (6%) reporting being part of a larger network or government.

- ■ Most (80%) surveyed organizations reported occupying the entire facility at the address referenced in the survey.

- ■ About three-quarters (71%) of surveyed organizations own their facility, with the remaining either leasing the facility (25%), leasing some parts of the space and owning others (2%), or indicating that the facility is part of a government or public agency (1%).

However, the mixture of owning and leasing may vary widely by segment. Among the core segment groups, respondents in the retail/entertainment segment group are most likely (51%) to report leasing their facility; and nonprofit/education/religious sector are least likely (16%).

4.1.2 Financials

Many respondents did not disclose their annual revenue or operating budget. Among those who did, the majority qualify as small businesses based on their revenue or operating budget (less than $10 million per year); most commonly between $100,000 and $1 million (Figure 7). A few have larger revenues or budgets but qualify as small businesses based on the number of employees they have (fewer than 500); and qualify for the Small Business Initiative based on their AIC rate code. Veteran-led organizations were more likely to report revenues or budgets of $10 million or more (16% compared to 7% amongst non-veteran-led), indicating that veteran-led organizations may include relatively larger, more successful, or better-funded organizations compared to other demographic segments.

As context, the average copay for SBDI (when copays were present) was about $1,500 in 2021, according to AIC. While this copay represents less than 2% of the budgets or revenues reported by about half of respondents, it may still present a barrier to organizations with revenues or budgets less than $100,000 per year; or otherwise for organizations with tight profit margins or limited excess budget.

Figure 7. 2020 Annual Operating Budgets or Revenues (n=280)

- 16% Less than $100,000
- 9% $100,000 to less than $300,000
- 8% $300,000 to less than $1,000,000
- 8% $1,000,000 to less than $10,000,000
- 8% $10,000,000 or more
- 14% Don't know
- 38% Refused

Anecdotally, East St. Louis businesses were generally on the lower end of this range compared to other communities: 28% of East St. Louis organizations reported revenues or budgets less than $100,000; compared to 9% to 14% in other communities. This finding speaks to the acute business community struggles that community leaders highlighted, associated with rapid outmigration in East St. Louis. One leader described it as follows:

I think there was just a turn when businesses just pulled out of East St. Louis. It's not because there's not a demand for the services or a demand for the products that the businesses might offer, they just.... And this has been many years ago, businesses just pulled out of the city. Some moved to other areas; and some just permanently closed. So downtown is now derelict... and you can kind of count the number of places that are open in downtown East St. Louis.

Further, survey results suggest that many of the surveyed organizations struggled financially during the COVID-19 pandemic. About half (45%) of surveyed organizations reported receiving COVID-19 relief funds, loans, or assistance. Women-led organizations were statistically more likely to report receiving COVID-19 assistance than non-women led organizations (53%, compared to 39%).

4.1.3   Establishment Age and Building Characteristics

The surveyed organizations are often established businesses or institutions in their communities: in many cases, they have far exceeded the national average life span of a small business (8.5 years according to the US Small Business Administration).[13] Over half (58%) of surveyed organizations have been operating for at least 12 years; more than a quarter (28%) for more than 33 years (Figure 8). CSI respondents tend to have been around longer than small business respondents: they are statistically more likely to have opened prior to 1970 compared to small businesses (34% vs. 10%), while small businesses are statistically more likely to report opening after 2010 (44% vs. 22%). This does, however, also suggest the CSIs operate in much older buildings compared to small businesses.[14] To this point, one of the community leaders from Monmouth, who represented a nonprofit organization, mentioned that the age of building can be a significant maintenance challenge for organizations like hers:

> *I have heard [about maintenance difficulties and/or expenses] from some nonprofits who are housed in very old buildings, like the old brick structures that are over a hundred years old. Those are obviously more expensive to maintain.*

Figure 8. Opening Year of Organizations (n=280)

Before 1970	Between 1970 and 1989	Between 1990 and 2009	After 2010	Don't know
14%	14%	30%	40%	2%
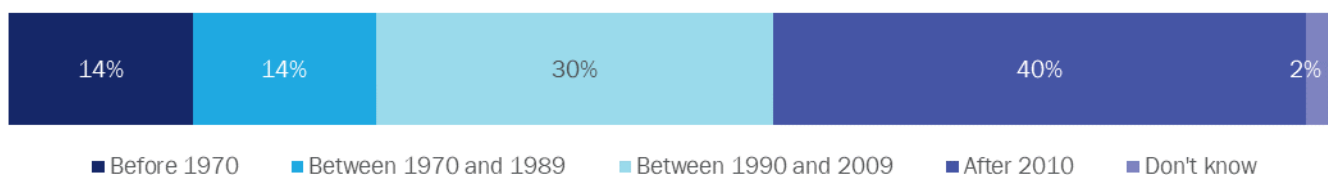
Nearly a quarter of respondents did not know the square footage of the space their organization occupies. Among those who did, surveyed organizations are generally located in smaller facilities, with over half (55%) of facilities being under 10,000 square feet (Figure 9). For comparison purposes, most surveyed organizations were much smaller than the average grocery store (about 48,000 square feet in 2020).[15]

Figure 9. Square Footage of Space Organization Occupies (n=280)

Less than 500 sq. ft.	500 to 999 sq. ft.	1,000 to 4,999 sq. ft.	5,000 to 9,999 sq. ft.	10,000 to 49,999 sq. ft.	50,000 to 99,999 sq. ft.	100,000 or more sq. ft.	Dont know
2%	8%	31%	14%	19%	3%	3%	21%
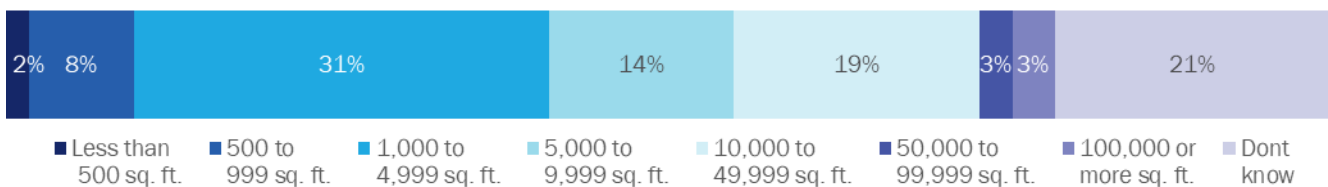
4.2   Fuel Sources

According to the AIC business customer data, surveyed organizations belong predominately to the "small general service" rate codes, DS-2 and/or GDS-2 (Table 8). More than half (53%) of the respondents are AIC

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[13] Nav. "Small Business Statistics." *Nav.* Accessed: March 14, 2022. https://www.nav.com/small-business-statistics/.
[14] We chose not to include the age of the building in the survey due to concerns that respondents could not reliably answer this question.
[15] FMI, The Food Industry Association. "Average Total Store Size: Square Feet." *Supermarket Facts.* Last Accessed: March 14, 2022. https://www.fmi.org/our-research/supermarket-facts/average-total-store-size-square-feet.

combo customers (i.e., they receive both electric and gas service from AIC); 39% are electric-only AIC service; and 8% are gas-only AIC service. Many of the electric-only AIC customers likely have gas service from another utility: about three-quarters (76%) of respondents reported having natural gas service at their facility whereas only 61% have an AIC gas rate code. All or most of the organizations in this survey would qualify for participation in the AIC Small Business Initiative, although AIC would need to review customers in the DS-5 rate code (outdoor lighting) for eligibility on a case-by-case basis.

Table 8. Respondent Rate Codes

Rate Code		Description	Number of Respondents	Percentage (n=280)
Electric	DS-2	Small General Service Delivery	245	88%
	DS-5	Lighting Service (i.e., outdoor lighting)	10	4%
	DS3-A	General Delivery Service < 400 kW	3	1%
Gas	GDS-2	Small General Gas Delivery	170	61%
	GDS-3	Intermediate General Gas Delivery Service	2	<1%

4.3   Demographics of Ownership and Administration

In the 2021 MDAP, AIC set goals for reaching business customers that are owned and operated by, or otherwise serve, a number of traditionally disadvantaged groups. These groups include, for example, military service organizations, women's shelters, and minority-owned restaurants. Further, the MDAP includes goals to recruit businesses as Program Allies or other vendors that are majority-owned by the following disadvantaged groups, with specific goals for organizations owned by women, minorities, and/or veterans. Our survey captured a significant number of respondents from these three priority groups, and we tested for significant differences in survey results across the demographics of ownership/administration, wherever possible.

Women-led organizations represented a little less than half of surveyed organizations (Figure 10). Most of these organizations (83 of 114) are led entirely by women; 30 are led by both women and men; and one is led by a person who is non-binary. Women-led organizations are statistically more likely to also be CSIs than men-led organizations (24%, compared to 14%).

Figure 10. Gender of Owner(s) or Administrator(s) of Organization (n=280; Multiple Response)
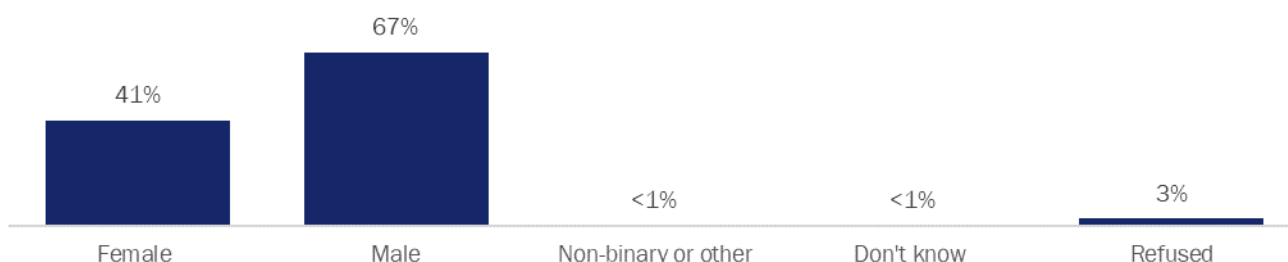
Minority-led organizations represented about a fifth of surveyed organizations (Figure 11). Minority-led organizations are statically more represented amongst CSIs compared to White-led organizations, particularly in the nonprofit, education, and religious segment group (24%, compared to 11% of non-minority-led

organizations). There is also significant correlation between the race/ethnicity and gender of owners and administrators: minority-led organizations are statistically more likely to also be women-led organizations compared to non-minority-led organizations (57%, compared to 37%). Further, more than half of the respondents (53%) from East St. Louis were minority-led organizations; compared to between 7% and 14% in other communities.

Figure 11. Race or Ethnicity of Owner(s) or Administrator(s) of Organization (n=280; Multiple Response)
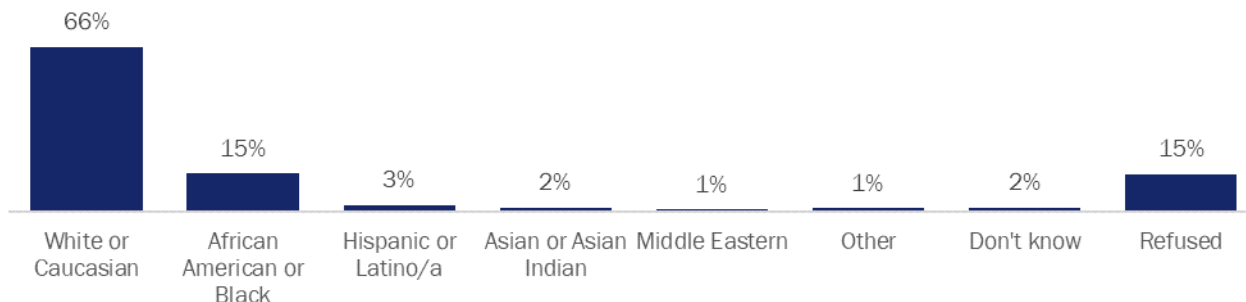
The survey included a few respondents from other high priority MDAP groups (Figure 12). The 43 veteran-led organizations were the only one of these additional groups with enough responses for meaningful, albeit limited, comparison.

Figure 12. Owner(s) or Administrator(s) in Other Priority MDAP Groups (n=280; Multiple Responses)

5. Detailed Findings

This chapter summarizes detailed findings from the study. While this chapter provides a comprehensive analysis of survey results, supplemented with community leader interview findings where appropriate, not all of the insights gleaned from the data directly informed our recommendations. Chapter 6 highlights the most important results from the study, our conclusions, and recommendations for AIC.

5.1 Importance of Energy Costs

We asked respondents several questions to understand how energy use fits into the holistic set of priorities their organizations manage on a regular basis.

5.1.1 Responsibility and Concern for Energy Costs

Organizations tend to be actively monitoring and aware of their energy bills, but energy costs typically do not rise to the top above other concerns. Almost all surveyed organizations (98%) indicated that they pay their own energy bills, which is likely correlated with the fact that most surveyed organizations are independently owned and operated. Nearly two-thirds of respondents (63%) said they were "a little" or "not at all concerned" about affording their energy costs. Among the remaining third who did express concern with affording energy costs, these concerns typically do not outrank other high priority concerns: about three-fifths of respondents (60%) indicated they are equally concerned about energy costs compared to other organizational expenses. The remaining respondents indicated being more concerned (19%) or less concerned (21%) about energy costs compared to other organizational expenses, which did not differ by organization type. Regardless of their level of concern, over two-thirds (70%) of respondents reported they, or someone else at their organization, review every or nearly every energy bill during a typical year (Figure 13).

Figure 13. Frequency of Reviewing Energy Bills During a Typical Year (n=280)

■ Every or nearly every bill ■ Most or some bills ■ A few, one, or no bills ■ Not applicable, not possible, or not sure

Managing energy costs is a mid-tier or low priority for most organizations. Some organizations are more concerned than others. About half of minority-led organizations (52%) and organizations in the retail/entertainment (53%) or the nonprofit/education/and religious (46%) segment groups reported that managing energy costs is a high priority (Figure 14).

Figure 14. Priority of Managing Energy Costs (n=280)

35%	40%	18%	7%

■ High priority   ■ Medium priority   ■ Low priority
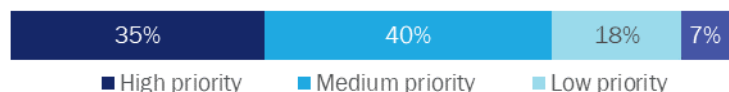
Note: "Don't know" percentage (<1% not shown).

Those indicating that managing energy costs at their organization was a lower priority or that they were not concerned about energy costs cited operating costs and staffing and labor as higher priorities (Figure 15).

Figure 15. Higher Priorities or Bigger Concerns than Managing Energy Costs (n=116; Multiple Response)

Operating costs	42%
Staffing and labor	34%
Cost of goods	22%
Revenue	5%
Sales	4%
Other	9%
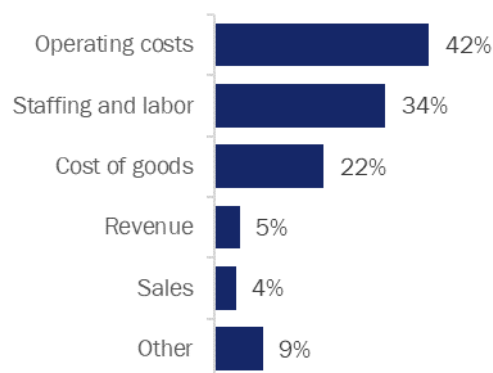
Note: Only asked of respondents who indicated that managing energy costs was a medium, low, or not a priority for their organization and/or that they were less concerned about energy costs compared to other expenses at their organization.

COMPETING PRIORITIES

Across the four Empower Communities, we heard from multiple leaders that managing energy costs is not high priority for organizations. It often is viewed as a fixed cost of doing business, but many would be grateful for the opportunity to lower their energy costs (lowering costs is different than managing costs).

Bigger priorities include those related to the financial bottom-line, staffing, training, and general operations. For CSIs, where the most value is placed on serving the community, decision-making often focuses on immediate needs. This sentiment is highlighted by the following quotes:

"I can feed a lot of people for $10,000. And if I have to make a choice between providing this service or doing some energy savings, I'm going to provide the direct service every time."

(Monmouth leader)

"From a non-profit point of view…, we don't keep a lot of dollars around for capital projects as much as we do for investments in staff and program."
(East St. Louis leader)

5.1.2   Impact of Energy Costs on Financial Performance

Energy costs have a greater impact on the financial performance of minority-led organizations and CSIs, compared to their counterparts. Most (64%) surveyed organizations report that energy costs have at least a moderate impact on their operating budgets, revenue, or profits (Figure 16). However, minority-led organizations are statistically more likely to report that energy costs have a large or moderate impact on their on their organizations' finances compared to non-minority led organizations (79% vs. 59%); as do CSIs (78%) compared to small businesses (60%). Organizations in the services segment group (e.g., tax and legal services; property management and real estate offices) were relatively less likely (54%) to say that energy costs have a moderate to large impact on the financial performance compared to the retail store/entertainment (72%) and nonprofit/education/religious (78%) segment groups.

Figure 16. Impact of Energy Costs on Financial Performance
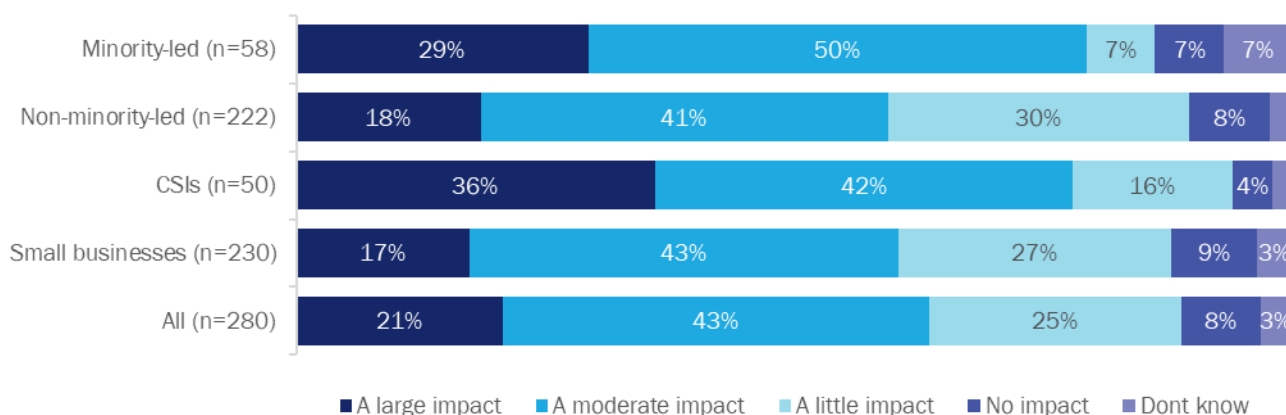
Q7. How much do energy costs affect the operating budget/annual revenues or profits of your business or organization?

5.2   Energy-Related Needs

We asked surveyed organizations about energy-related needs in a few different ways: what equipment in their organization they perceive to use the most energy; the extent to which they think energy upgrades or improved energy management is needed for their organizations; and about other energy-related difficulties such as HCS issues.

5.2.1   Energy-Using Equipment

We asked respondents what systems or equipment (or broadly end uses) they thought were the "biggest energy users" at their organization. The purpose of this question was to understand possible drivers of energy costs or, otherwise, what end uses are top-of-mind for organizations. In either case, these end uses may feel more relevant to organizations and could be prioritized or highlighted in ME&O efforts.

Surveyed organizations typically think cooling, heating, and/or lighting equipment are the biggest energy users. These three categories were the most common across the board, although CSIs reported them more often than small businesses in all cases (Figure 17). Kitchen and cooking equipment, while mentioned by only a third of all respondents, is a big energy user for specific types of organizations. The nonprofit, education, and religious segment group mentioned kitchen and cooking equipment twice as often as the

other core segment groups; and 10 of 17 churches mentioned it, meaning they likely provide some sort of meal services (e.g., meals for their church members and/or soup kitchens). While the sample sizes are small, we noted some additional anecdotal trends for specific types of organizations:

- Office equipment (e.g., IT and computer equipment) was the fourth most common big energy user respondents reported overall, but the contractor segment group mentioned this most often (68%), followed by services (58%) then nonprofit/education/religious (56%).

- Most housing (88%) and four out of five lodging organizations said water heating was a big energy user.

- As expected, most restaurants said commercial refrigeration (93%) and/or kitchen and cooking appliances (73%) were big energy users, more than any other segment group. Housing was the next most common segment group to mention one of these (63% kitchen equipment and 40% commercial refrigeration).

- Almost all (92%) manufacturing/repair organizations mentioned compressed air equipment as big energy users, far more than any other segment.

Figure 17. Top-of-Mind End Uses, by Core Segment Group (Multiple Response)
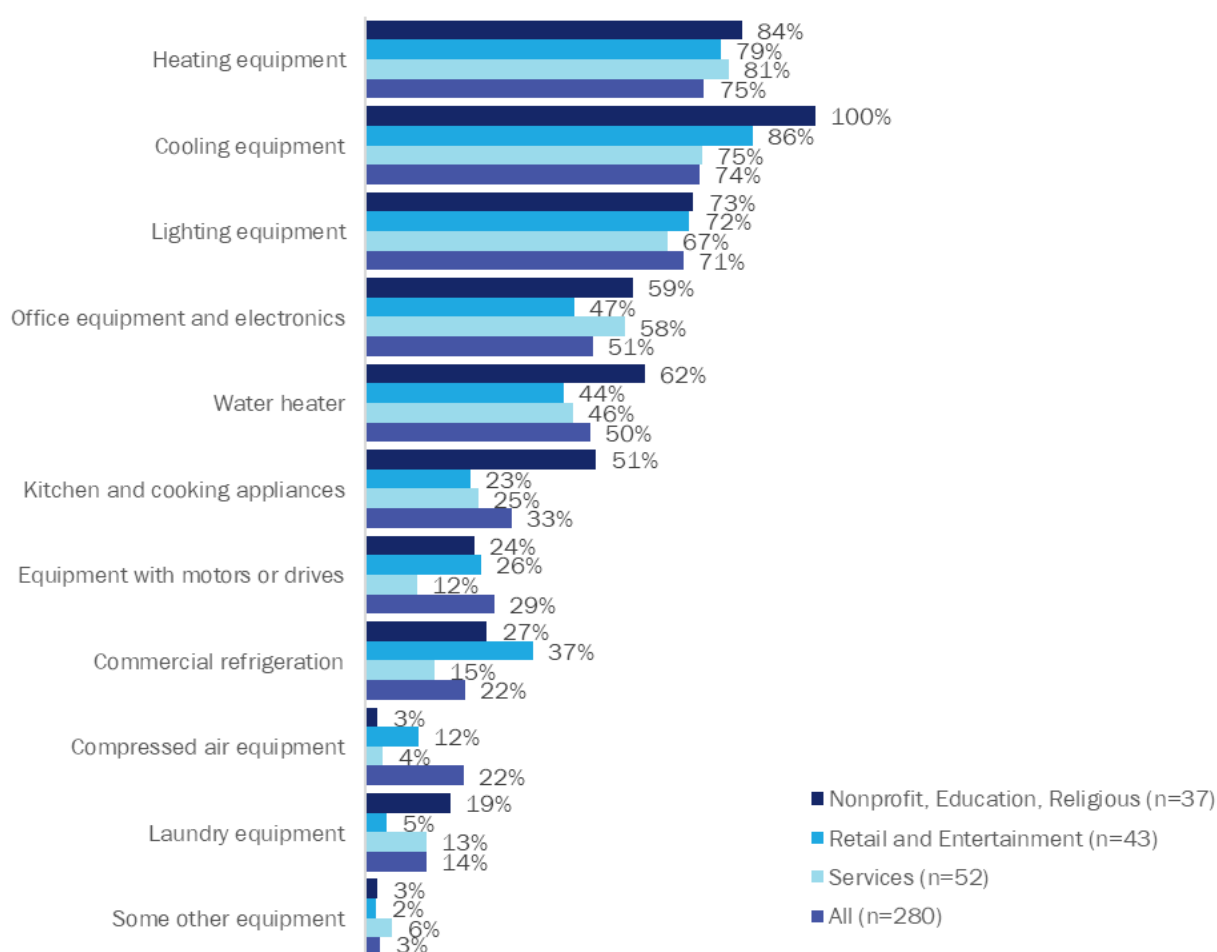
Q5. During a typical year, do you consider each of the following to be a big user of energy at your business or organization?

5.2.2   Energy Upgrade and Management Opportunities

Most surveyed organizations see potential to make energy efficiency upgrades or changes at their facility. Two-thirds (66%) of surveyed organizations report that if cost were not a factor in their decision, at least a few upgrades could potentially be made by their organization to reduce energy use (Figure 18). Women- and minority-led organizations and CSIs are statistically more likely than their counterparts to report that at least a few upgrades could be made to their facilities: about three-quarters of each group said there were opportunities. Among surveyed organizations who reported having few or no upgrades that could be made, a large majority (88%) reported that most or all equipment is already energy efficient.

Figure 18. Perceived Number of Energy Efficiency Upgrades that Could Be Made
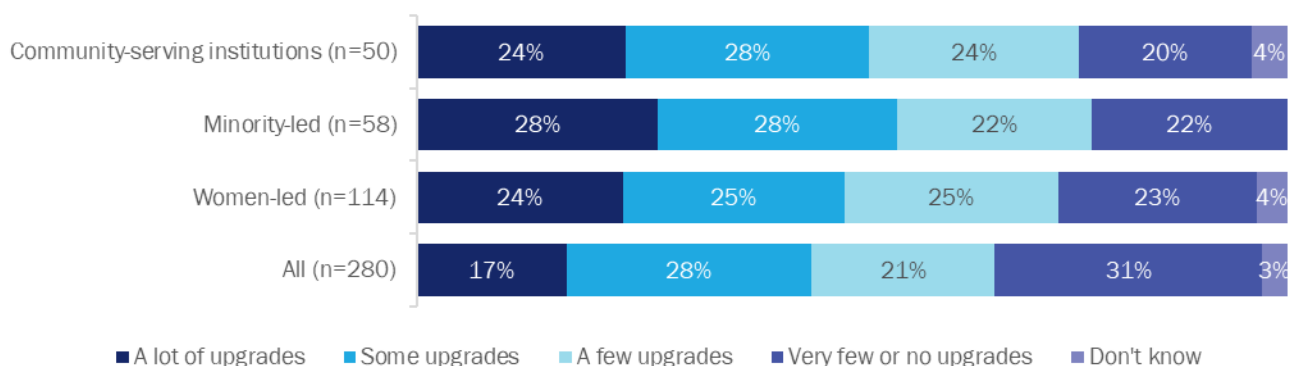
Q19. Please consider energy efficiency upgrades that could be made to your facility and equipment to reduce energy costs, such as lighting, heating and cooling, appliances, electronics, insulation, windows, etc., For purposes of this question, do not think about the costs or any other limitations to making the upgrades, just focus on what upgrades could technically be made. How many upgrades could your business or organization make to reduce its energy costs?

Weatherization was the most common self-reported energy upgrade need. Among those who said at least some upgrades were needed, their specific needs varied widely across most of the categories we asked about (Figure 19). Surveyed organizations most often mentioned a need to weatherize their facility (examples we gave in the survey question were "weather-stripping, caulking, air sealing, etc."); followed by upgrading windows then replacing a major type of equipment. Comparing the data to Figure 17 (perceived big energy users), "major type of equipment" likely means heating or cooling equipment in most cases, and in some cases water heating or large lighting upgrades, but this will vary by organization type.

Figure 19. Energy Upgrade Opportunities (n=186)
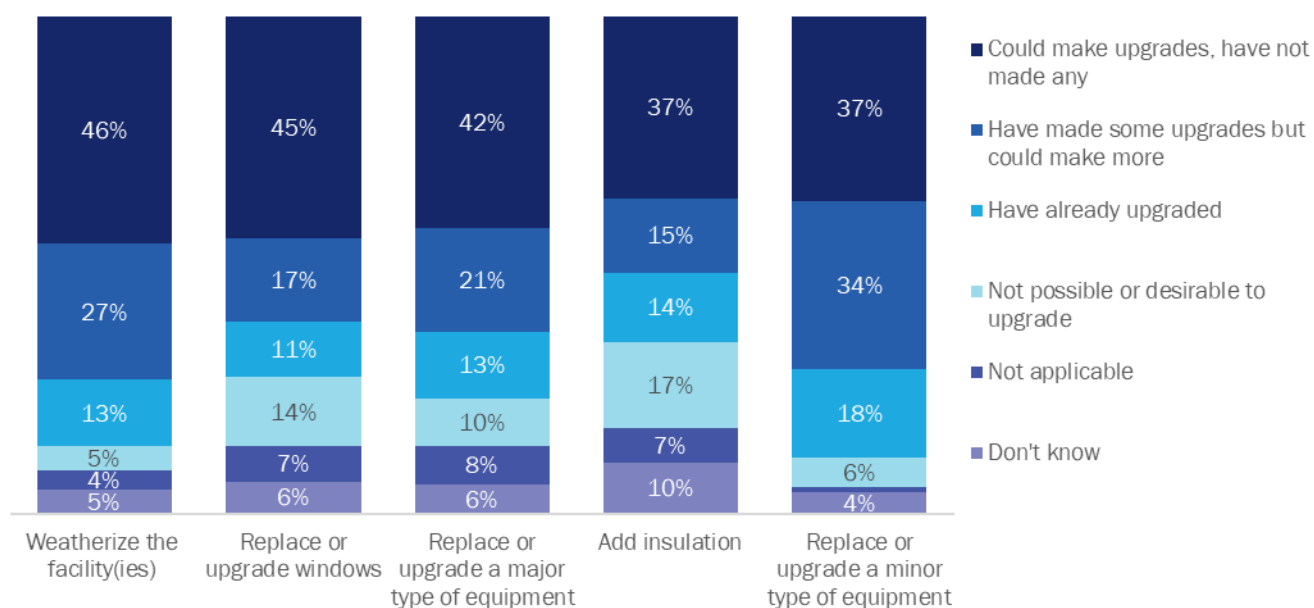
Q21. What upgrades could your business or organization make to reduce its energy costs?

Notes: Only asked of respondents who reported at least a few upgrades could be made to their organization's facilities. Labels for percentages less than 3% not shown.

Definitions of major and minor in the survey: "Replace or upgrade a **major** type of equipment with an energy efficient model, like a heating or cooling system, a water heater, an appliance, a refrigeration case or system" and "Replace or upgrade a **minor** type of equipment with an energy efficient model, like light bulbs, a thermostat, power strips, portable fans, etc."

Most surveyed organizations feel they are or are close to doing all they can to manage their energy use. Examples we gave in the survey question were "changing equipment settings to operate more efficiently, using equipment less often, turning off equipment when not in use, or using equipment during times when energy prices and demand are low". About half (51%) of surveyed organizations reported that their organization could take at least a few actions to better manage energy use, but nearly as many said there were not (Figure 20). Among surveyed organizations who reported that very few or no actions could be taken to save energy, a large majority (87%) indicated they already save as much energy as possible.

Figure 20. Perceived Number of Energy Management Changes that Could Be Made (n=280)

Energy management needs varied widely but surveyed organizations focused slightly more on developing company policies and/or staff education and training. Among respondents who reported at least a few actions could be taken by their organization to reduce energy use, the most often mentioned actions were information-based or policy-setting actions, such as creating longer-term energy savings goals or posting signage (i.e., flyers, bulletins, images) around the facility to remind staff about saving energy (Figure 21). Some organizations felt they could do more to adjust controls or turn off unnecessary equipment, but

respondents were slightly more likely to say that their organization had already done what it can in those areas. Lighting usage behavior was the area surveyed organizations most often felt they already had under control.

Figure 21. Actions Organization Could Take to Reduce Energy Use (n=140)
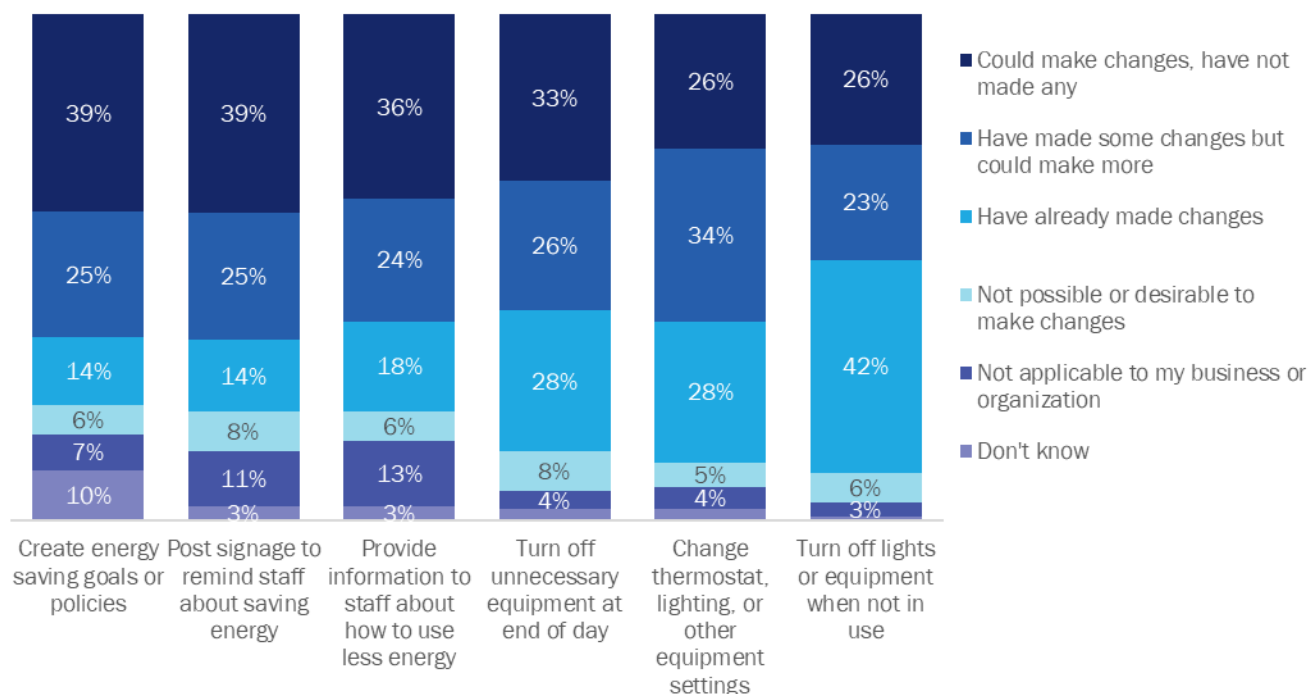
Q27. What actions could your business or organization and its employees and staff change to save energy?
Notes: Only asked of respondents who reported at least a few actions could be taken at their organization to reduce energy use. Labels for percentages less than 3% not shown.

5.2.3   Other Energy-Related Difficulties

Minority- and women-led organizations report experiencing greater energy-related difficulties compared to their counterparts. We asked respondents about how much difficulty their organization experienced with energy-related issues in the last two years, including affording energy costs and a number of HCS needs that are often related to energy-using equipment. The incidence of these difficulties was rare overall (a quarter or less of total respondents mentioned any of them), but minority-led organizations were statistically nearly twice as likely to report having "lots" or "some" difficulty affording energy costs; maintaining comfortable indoor air temperatures; operating energy using equipment safely; and/or keeping mold, mildew, or pests out of their facility (Figure 22). Similarly, women-led organizations are statistically more likely to report difficulty with affording energy costs and keeping mold, mildew, or pests out of their facilities. While not shown in the figure below, CSIs (which are more often comprised of women and minority-led organizations than small businesses) were statistically more likely to experience difficulty affording energy costs compared to small businesses (36% vs. 21% reporting "lots' of "some" difficulty affording energy costs).

Figure 22. Energy-related Areas of Difficulty in Past Two Years, by Organization Type
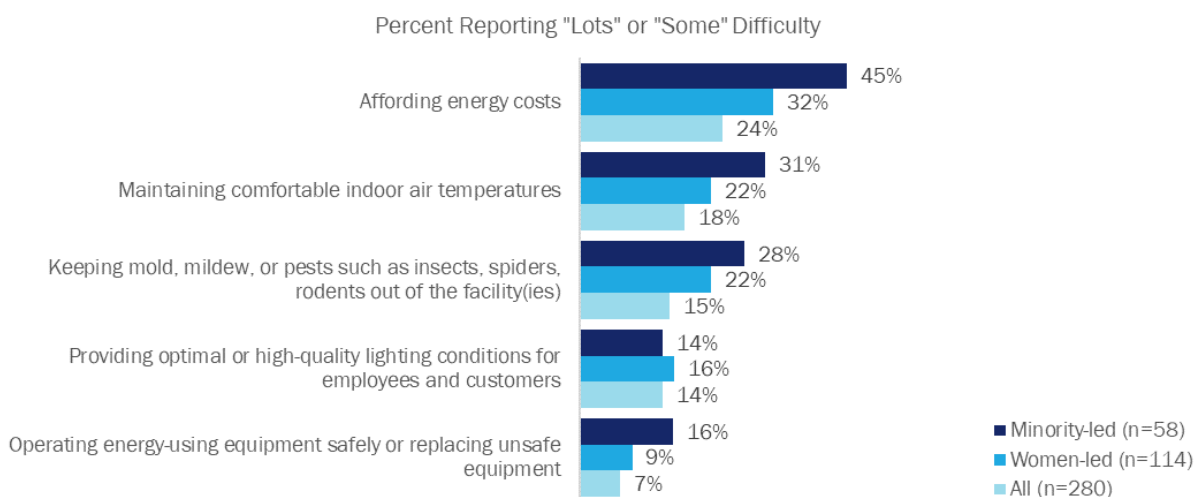
Percent Reporting "Lots" or "Some" Difficulty

Q12. During the past two years, has your business or organization experienced a lot, some, a little, or no difficulty...?

5.3 Actions Taken to Manage Energy Costs

Most surveyed organizations have tried to do something to address their energy costs, and most often rely on no- or low-cost strategies to manage their energy costs directly. Almost all (94%) surveyed organizations reported that they did something to help afford energy costs, reduce energy use, or otherwise address the HCS needs of their employees and customers.[16] As shown in Figure 23, two of the top three strategies were low- or no-cost: creating energy-savings policies or adjusting space and water heating controls. These strategies align with the types of small or incremental improvement that AIC's Virtual Commissioning offering often prioritizes. When it came to making actual upgrades, lighting was the most common end-use organizations addressed; followed by purchasing efficient equipment or appliances, then making building shell improvements.

Figure 23. Actions Taken to Address Energy Costs Directly (n=280; Multiple Responses)

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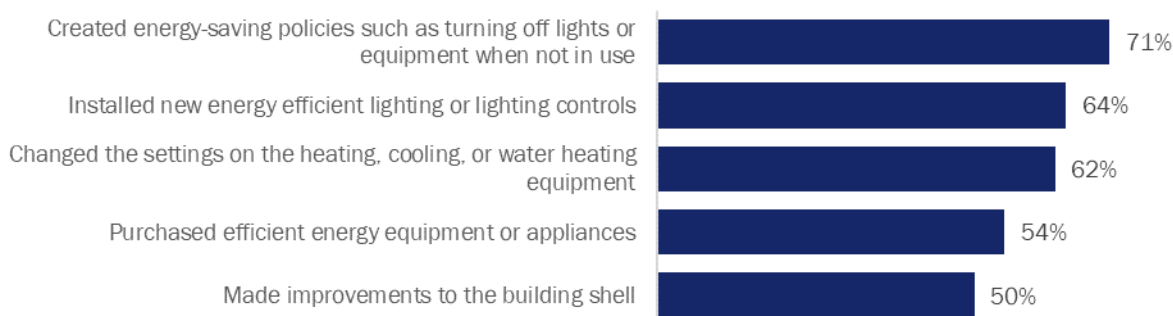
[16] We chose to include HCS in this question because HCS (not energy savings) may be the primary motivator for organizations to take some energy-saving actions, like weatherization or HVAC upgrades.

Actions taken by organizations have been impactful for many, but there is room for improvement. Among respondents who reported taking any actions to directly address energy costs, comfort, or HCS, over half report seeing some reduction in energy usage because of the actions (Figure 24). About a quarter in each category say the actions did not have an impact; and an unusually large proportion of don't know responses indicate that many surveyed organizations are simply unsure whether what they did had an impact. CSIs were statistically more likely to report seeing reduction in energy usage from building shell improvements than small businesses (78% vs. 51%), possibly because CSI are more often in older facilities (see discussion above Figure 8).

Figure 24. If Actions Taken Resulted in Reduction in Organization's Energy Use or Costs
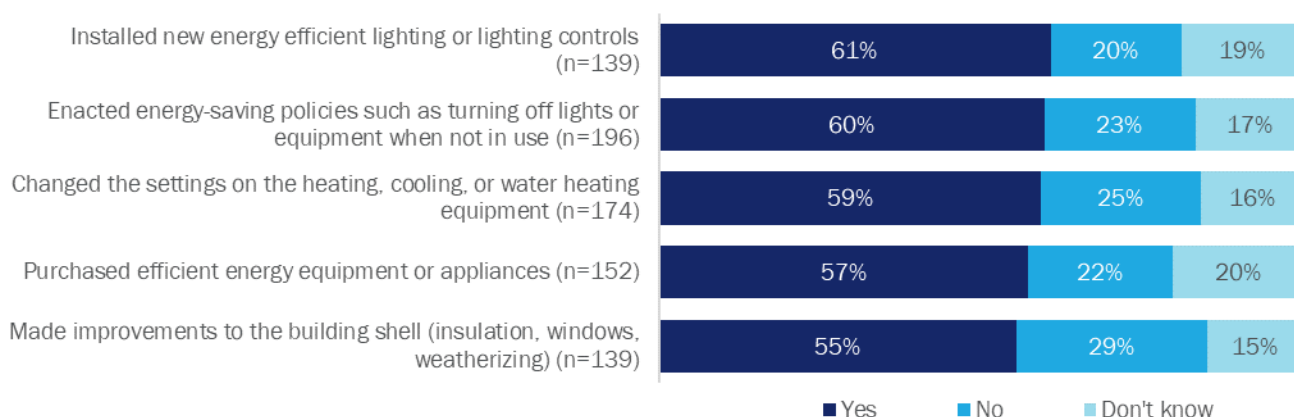
Q18. Did your business or organization see a reduction in its energy usage or costs from any of the following?
Note: Only asked of respondents who reported taking applicable actions.

Some organizations, however, chose to cope with energy costs indirectly, often with negative impacts their business, their employees, and potentially the Empower Communities at large. While not the majority, a significant number of surveyed organizations took actions like increasing prices, laying off employees or postponing hiring, or reducing employee compensation to manage their energy costs (Figure 25); strategies that organizations often use when dealing with other types of operational costs challenges that they may not be able to fully control (e.g., supply costs and shortages; funding cuts). There were a few noticeable trends amongst the core segment and demographic groups we compared:

- Retail/Entertainment organizations were the most likely to increase the prices of goods compared to the other core segment groups (40%; versus 14% to 21%).

- Organizations in the nonprofits/education/religious segment group were more likely to reduce employee compensation compared to the other core segment groups (22% vs. 9%–14%).

- About a third of CSI (34%) and minority-led organization (33%) respondents sought outside financial assistance (loans, grants, or other assistance) with their energy costs; more than twice as often as small businesses and non-minority-led organizations (14% each). Organizations in East St. Louis had a similar trend compared to the other communities, which may be more attributable to the larger number of CSIs and minority-led organizations in East St. Louis.

- Minority-led organizations are statistically more likely than non-minority-led organizations to report reducing the number of employees or postponing hiring (22% vs. 12%).

Figure 25. Actions Taken to Address Energy Costs Indirectly (n=280; Multiple Response)
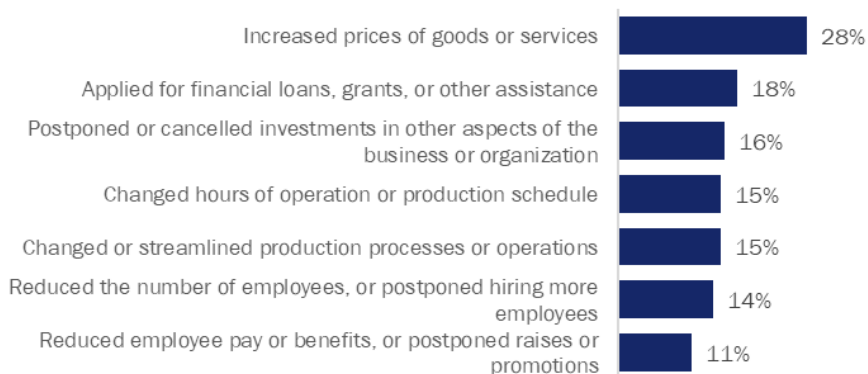
5.4 Barriers to Energy Upgrades and Management

We asked surveyed organizations about barriers to making energy upgrades or otherwise managing energy usage through several different lenses.

5.4.1 Control Over Energy Costs

Organizations generally feel they do not have a high degree of control over their energy use. About one-third (31%) of surveyed organizations reported having "total" or "a lot" of control over how much energy their organization uses and how much it pays for (Figure 26). Lack of control appears to be a common conception across the board; perceived level of control does not differ significantly by organization type, core segment group, or demographics.

Figure 26. Organization's Level of Control Over How Much Energy It Uses and Pays For (n=280)
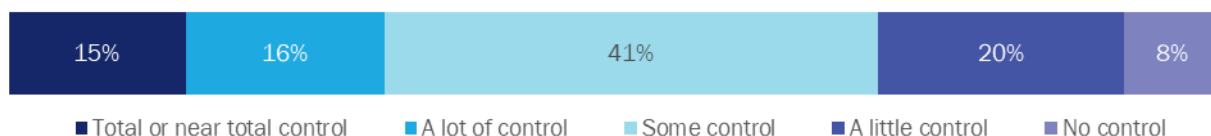
We asked respondents about a number of potential challenges (Figure 27) related to controlling their energy costs; and a few particular challenges rose to the top:

- **Affordability:** The most commonly reported obstacle was upfront costs. Over half (57%) of respondents agreed with the statement, "the upfront costs or capital investment required to replace or upgrade the facility or equipment can be unaffordable."

- **Structural Barriers**: The next most common challenges appear to be limitations related to the nature of their businesses. Nearly half of respondents agreed with the statement that they had already done all they could (46%) and/or that employee and customers occupancy patterns limit how much they can feasibly do (44%).

- **Lack of contractors**: About two in five respondents (41%) agreed with the statement, "finding qualified contractors or equipment for making repairs and upgrades can be challenging." Finding qualified contractors was a much more common barrier for minority-led organizations (62%) compared to non-minority-led organizations (35%). This issue was more common in East St. Louis (49%) and Decatur (41%); and less common in SRC (37%) and Monmouth (30%).

- **Knowledge:** Over a third of respondents (38%) agreed with the statement, "I don't know how best to manage our energy usage or what upgrades to make." Another quarter (24%) agreed with the statement, "the employees responsible for making repairs and upgrades or for managing energy usage do not have enough time, training, information, or resources to do so."

Minority-led organizations experienced several of these challenges much more often than non-minority-led organizations. These included employees not having time, training, or resources (40% vs. 19%); finding qualified contractors or equipment (62% vs. 35%); and not knowing how to best manage energy use or what upgrades to make (55% vs. 34%).

Conversely, veteran-led organizations experienced several of these challenges less often compared to non-veteran led organizations. These included not being able to afford upfront costs (48% vs. 59%); finding qualified contractors (34% vs. 42%); and not knowing how to best manage energy use or what upgrades to make (30% vs. 40%).

BUILDING A QUALIFIED WORKFORCE

We heard from both SRC and East St. Louis leaders how difficult it was at times to hire, train, and retain a qualified energy efficiency contractor workforce. However, the challenges are different between these two communities.

East St. Louis leaders highlighted a lack of local qualified workforce in general. One leader also mentioned that due to issues such as crime, some out-of-town contractors are unwilling to travel to East St. Louis for work.

One leader mentioned that fully endowed scholarships (i.e., that relives the full financial burden of an education) for students going into the energy may be part of the solution for developing a local and diverse workforce in East St. Louis.

SRC leaders focused on the lack of Program Allies, not necessarily a lack of local contractors. They said the lack of Program Allies in the area could increase the cost of a project, because organizations would need to pay someone to come in to SRC from out of town and the time spent driving is billable. This leader said:

"You're paying a journeyman electrician $120 an hour to drive an hour down to Mounds…you're spending a lot of money before you ever even get anything done."
(SRC Leader)

Figure 27. Agreement with Challenges for Controlling Energy Usage and Costs (n=280)

	Agree	Disagree	Not applicable	Don't know
The upfront costs or capital investment required to replace or upgrade the facility(ies) or equipment can be unaffordable	57%	28%	8%	7%
We've already done all we can do to manage and control energy usage and make upgrades	46%	42%	4%	9%
Having customers or employees in the facility(ies) can limit how or when you can use different types of equipment	44%	41%	13%	
Finding qualified contractors or equipment for making repairs and upgrades can be challenging	41%	47%	8%	4%
We sometimes don't know how to best manage our energy usage or what upgrades to make	38%	52%	5%	4%
Managing energy usage or making repairs and upgrades is not a high priority	28%	67%		5%
Getting approval to repair or upgrade the facility(ies) and/or equipment can be difficult	26%	58%	8%	8%
The employees responsible for making repairs and upgrades or for managing energy usage do not have enough time, training, information, or resources to do so	24%	50%	20%	6%
The facility(ies) and/or equipment is old, inefficient, broken, or not performing well	22%	64%	7%	8%

Q14. Do you agree or disagree with the following challenges for controlling how much energy your business or organization uses and pays for?

5.4.2   Decision-Making Power

Most organizations have a high degree of decision-making power related to energy upgrades. As discussed in Chapter 4, most surveyed organizations are independently own their organization and facility; and we can infer that most of these organizations are fully responsible for making decisions related to upgrades and do not require outside approval. Among the minority of organizations who lease their space, over half report that their organization is responsible for making decisions about equipment upgrades and building shell improvements (Figure 28).

Figure 28. Decision Making About Equipment or Building Shell Upgrades (n=88)
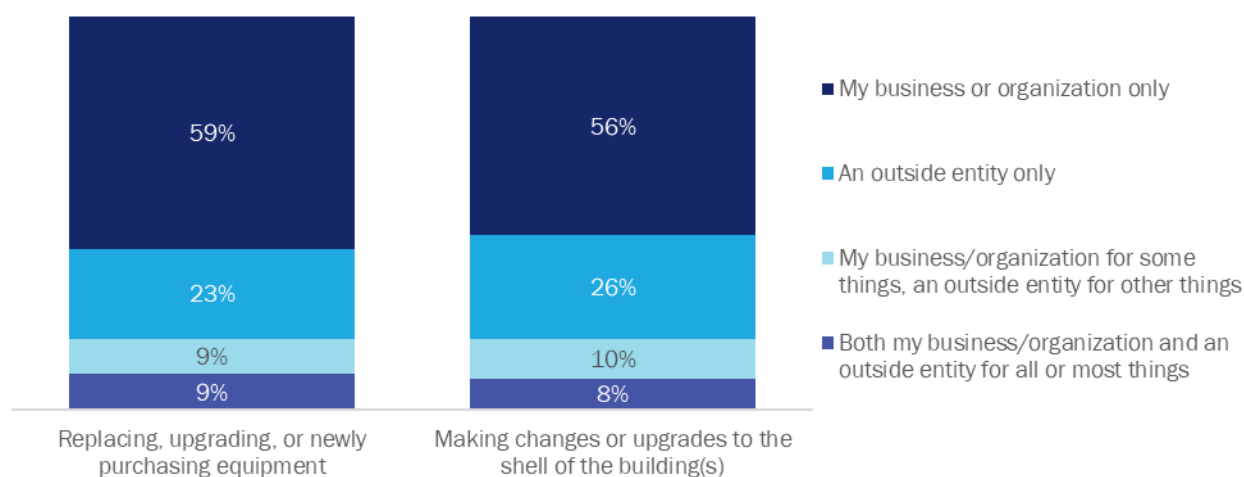
Q4. Who is responsible for making decisions about each of the following? Is it your business or organization, an outside entity like a property manager or owner, a corporate office, parent company, public agency, etc., or both?
Note: Only respondents who indicated they rent the facility and/or the organization was not independently owned.

The approval process is more difficult for certain types of organizations. When we asked about barriers to controlling energy usage (Figure 27 in the previous section), a quarter of surveyed organizations said "getting approval to repair or upgrade facilities can be difficult." These difficulties may refer to the process of getting approval from an outside entity or their own internal process. While relatively less common overall, certain types of organizations mentioned these difficulties more often:

- Woman-led organizations are statistically more likely than non-women-led organizations to report difficulties getting approval (36% vs. 20%);

- Minority-led organizations are statistically more likely than non-minority-led organizations to report difficulties getting approval (43% vs. 22%); and

- CSIs were statically more than twice as likely as small businesses segment to report difficulties getting approval (48% vs. 22%).

These findings are intertwined, as women- and minority-led organizations are heavily represented among the surveyed CSIs.

5.4.3 Barriers to Energy Efficiency Upgrades

Financial concerns and a lack of information are the primary barriers to energy efficiency upgrades. Among surveyed organizations who report that at least a few upgrades could be made by their organization to reduce energy costs (see Figure 18 above), just over one-third (34%) mentioned their organization would be "extremely" or "very" likely to make energy efficiency upgrades to their facilities or equipment in the next two years. Minority-led organizations and CSIs are statistically more likely than their counterparts to report their organization would be extremely or very likely to make upgrades in the next two years (47% and 55%, compared to 30% vs. 28%, respectively).

Among respondents who indicated their organization would be somewhat, slightly, or not at all likely to make energy efficiency upgrades to their facilities or equipment in the next two years, about two-thirds cited high upfront or out-of-pocket costs as the barrier; and more than half said they need to know more about their options (Figure 29).

While upfront costs were the most financial common reasons, some respondents mentioned a plethora of different finance and organizational policy challenges, such as uncertain payback or return on investment with energy savings, or an organizational preference to avoid early replacement or for choosing standard or least-cost equipment. Finally, among those who rent or lease their facilities, a little over a third said getting approval was a challenge.

Uncertain Investments

Leaders from all four communities emphasized the financial challenges and uncertain payback related to energy efficiency upgrades. Upfront cost was by far the most common barrier to upgrades that they mentioned

A leader from Decatur suggested that upfront cost would be a barrier even in the case of the SBDI Initiative, where there is only a minimal co-pay. Leaders mentioned that these businesses are aware of energy savings but are trying to find the least expensive way to get there. For example, another Decatur leader mentioned that sometimes small businesses are doing upgrades themselves, without a contractor, to save money.

Another leader in Monmouth mentioned that a lot of small businesses in town do not last more than five years. This means that long paybacks do not make sense for energy-efficient upgrades.

Leaders in East St. Louis echoed both issues. One leader said that even if AIC were to reimburse some business customers the full cost after upgrades were complete, many of these businesses would still not be able to participate because they would not have the funds available upfront to participate. Additionally, one leader mentioned a lack of return on investment being a barrier; specifically, that it was a critical concern to understand if there is a lifespan on the building which would allow for a return on the investment.

Figure 29. Reasons Not Very Likely to Make Energy Efficiency Upgrades (n=114; Multiple Response)

Reason	Percentage
Upfront or out-of-pocket costs are too high	67%
Need more information about energy efficiency options	55%
Equipment has to fail or break before it's replaced or upgraded	52%
Energy savings are not big enough to justify the costs of energy efficient upgrades	41%
Payback period for making energy efficient upgrades would be too long	39%
Must get approval from those in the business or organization who make decisions about facility or equipment upgrades	37%[a]
Prefer the lowest cost, least efficient equipment model or option	21%
Something else	10%

[a] Only asked of respondents who reported their organization would be somewhat, slightly, or not at all likely to make energy efficiency upgrades to their facilities or equipment in the next two years. Only respondents who indicated their organization rented or leases space or is part of a large network or government were provided the option "must get approval from those in the business or organization who make decisions about facility or equipment upgrades (n=35).

5.4.4 Barriers to Energy Management

Many organizations indicate they need additional information about energy management. Among respondents who reported that at least a few actions could be taken by their organization to improve energy management (see Figure 20 above), about one-third (31%) mentioned their organization would be "extremely" or "very" likely to take actions to reduce energy usage at facility in the next two years. Minority-led organizations were particularly interested in improving energy management (61% reporting extremely or very likely to take actions). Among respondents who indicated their organization would be less likely ("somewhat", "slightly," or "not at all" likely), about half indicated they would need more information on what actions to take (45%) and/or they are unable to change some equipment settings, usage, or schedule (45%; Figure 30).

Figure 30. Reasons Not Very Likely to Take Actions to Reduce Energy Use (n=92; Multiple Responses)
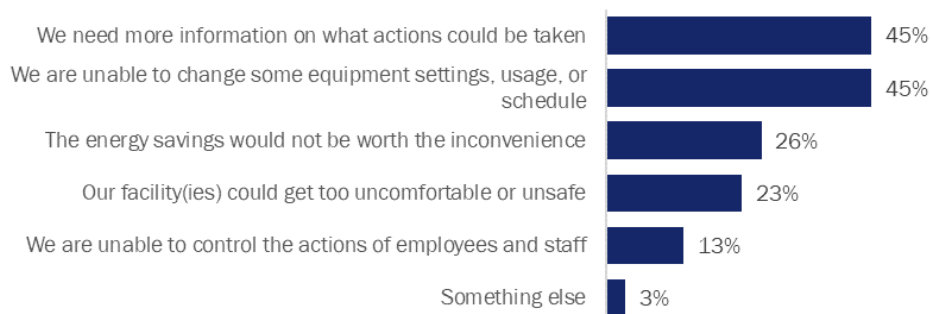
Reason	Percentage
We need more information on what actions could be taken	45%
We are unable to change some equipment settings, usage, or schedule	45%
The energy savings would not be worth the inconvenience	26%
Our facility(ies) could get too uncomfortable or unsafe	23%
We are unable to control the actions of employees and staff	13%
Something else	3%

Note: Only asked of respondents who reported their organization would be somewhat, slightly, or not at all likely to take actions to reduce energy use in the next two years.

5.5   Barriers to AIC Business Program Participation

In addition to barriers in general, we also asked surveyed organizations about their awareness of, interested in, and barrier to participate in AIC's Business Program.

Most surveyed organizations are unaware or have limited familiarity with AIC's Business Program. About one-fifth reporting they are "extremely" or "very" familiar with "Ameren Illinois Energy Efficiency Programs" (Figure 31). Among respondents who reported being at least a little familiar with Ameren Illinois energy efficiency programs, about half (46%) indicated that their organization has participated in an AIC offering before. Assuming those who are not familiar have likely not participated, less than a third (28%) of total surveyed have ever participated. CSIs were statistically more likely to report participating than small businesses (57% vs. 43%). Among those who reported their organization has participated in or received incentives through Ameren Illinois' energy efficiency programs, over two-thirds (69%) report they have seen benefits, including reduced energy costs or increased comfort and safety as a result of their participation.

Figure 31. Familiarity with AIC Energy Efficiency Offerings (n=280)

7%	12%	26%	15%	38%	

■ Extremely familiar ■ Very familiar ■ Somewhat familiar ■ A little familiar ■ Not at all familiar ■ Don't know
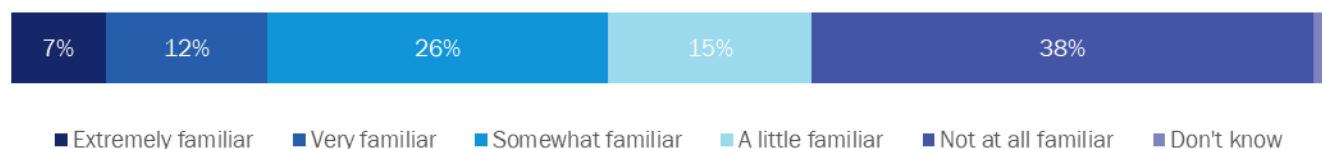
Q31. How familiar are you with any of Ameren Illinois' incentive offerings or programs for energy efficiency upgrades?
Note: "Don't know" percentage less than 3% not shown.

Familiarity with the AIC Business Program differs by community. The smaller communities (SRC and Monmouth) were more often "not at all familiar" with AIC's offerings compared to the larger communities (Figure 32); with respondents from SRC being particularly unfamiliar.

Figure 32. Familiarity with AIC Energy Efficiency Offerings, by Community

	Extremely familiar	Very familiar	Somewhat familiar	A little familiar	Not at all familiar	Don't know
Decatur (n=138)	6%	17%	28%	13%	35%	
East St. Louis (n=61)	10%	10%	30%	16%	30%	5%
Monmouth (n=37)	5%	8%	30%	14%	43%	
SRC (n=43)	7%	5%	9%	23%	53%	
All (n=280)	7%	12%	26%	15%	38%	

■ Extremely familiar ■ Very familiar ■ Somewhat familiar ■ A little familiar ■ Not at all familiar ■ Dont know
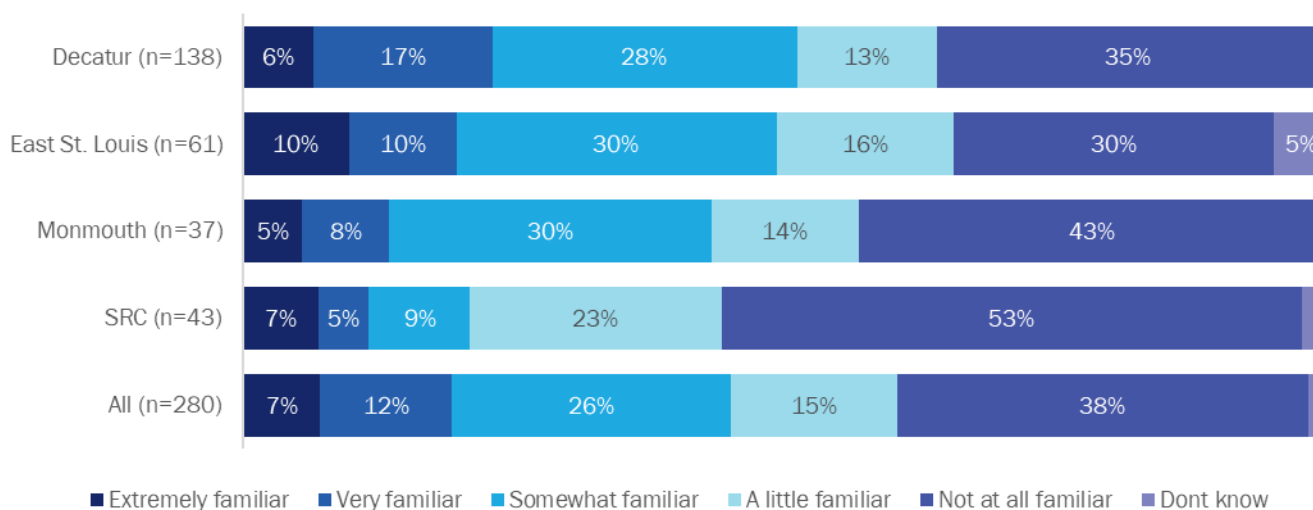
Note: "Don't know" percentage less than 3% not shown.

One Size Does Not Fit All in Southern Illinois

Three SRC leaders reported a lack of knowledge or AIC offering awareness as a barrier to participation or upgrades; more often than any of the other communities.

In general, these leaders believed AIC customers would be interested in participating in AIC offerings, if they became aware, but that business owners can get focused on what they are doing and not think to innovate around energy efficiency and/or participating in a program.

One leader highlighted a nuance specific to the deregulated Illinois energy landscape:

"...Ameren is not a generator...they're a distributor. So, customers may be getting a bill with nothing...mentioned on the bill about Ameren, although they're paying the Ameren distribution fees. But it may just be from...one of the other electric providers, the generators. So, it's kind of an out of sight, out of mind. They may not have the foggiest notion about the energy efficiency program."

However, the extent of the awareness challenges may vary widely across different parts of Southern

There is moderate interest in participating in Ameren Illinois' Business Program, with vulnerable organizations expressing highest interest. About two-thirds of surveyed organizations reported having "a lot" or "some" interest in participating, with minority-led organizations (46%), CSIs (47%), and organizations in the nonprofit, education, and religious segment group (53%) being most like to report a lot of interest (Figure 33).

Figure 33. Level of Interest in Participating in AIC Energy Efficiency Offerings (n=275)
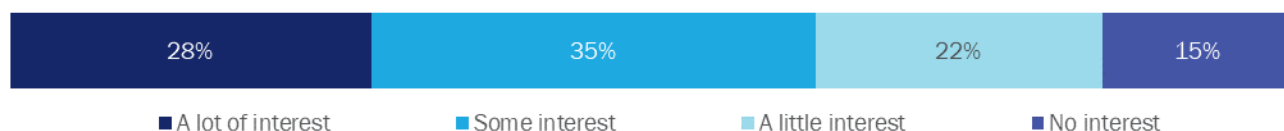
28%	35%	22%	15%

■ A lot of interest ■ Some interest ■ A little interest ■ No interest

Q36. How much interest would your business or organization have in learning about and potentially participating in [a different or the same] Ameren Illinois' energy efficiency offerings or programs?
Note: Respondents who reported they did not know if they were familiar with Ameren Illinois energy efficiency programs were not asked this question.

In addition to limited awareness, lack of information is a primary barrier to participating in AIC Business Program offerings. We asked surveyed organizations who were at least a little familiar with AIC energy efficiency offerings but had not participated previously about why they had not participated. The reasons varied widely, but the most common was a lack of information about how to participate or what upgrades could be made (Figure 34). One Decatur interviewee discussed that while awareness of AIC's energy efficiency offerings was high, about "90%" of the business customers they interacted with were aware of AIC's energy efficiency offerings, they weren't knowledgeable about all the steps needed for participation. They stated that there were a lot of steps between "knowing" about offerings and "how to do [it]" (i.e., participate).

Figure 34. Reasons for Not Participating in Any AIC Energy Efficiency Offerings (n=84; Multiple Response)

Reason	Percentage
Need more information about how to participate	33%
Need more information about what upgrades my business or organization could make	20%
Been too busy, forgot about it, it's lower priority	15%
Rebates and discounts are too small or the payback period is too long to make it worth participating	10%
Lack of interest in or need for participating in the programs	8%
Waiting on COVID-19 pandemic to ease up	7%
Tried to participate in the past but my business or organization, facility, or equipment did not qualify	4%
Tried to participate in the past but it was too difficult, inconvenient, or time-consuming	4%
Unable or have not tried to get approval from those in the business or organization who make decisions about participating in programs	4%
Prefer or required to purchase a specific type or model of equipment and/or order it from specific vendors	1%
Prefer to get used, free, refurbished, or borrowed equipment from online or other sources	1%
Something else	6%

Note: Only respondents who indicated they were at least a little familiar with AIC energy efficiency offerings but their organization had not participated received this question.

Time is Money

While survey respondents did not mention it often, some leaders mentioned time-constraints as a key barrier to AIC Business Program participation.

Decatur leaders mentioned this more often than other communities, suggesting this may be a more common challenge in bigger cities with more business traffic. For example, a small business owner in Decatur may be busy running their business and spending time talking to an AIC representative is not a priority. One Decatur leader suggested it may even seem like a minor annoyance during the workday when an AIC representative shows up to talk about energy efficiency offerings and they are busy with day-to-day operations. The lack of time makes it difficult to prioritize upgrades, and this may especially be true when talking about upgrading and improving systems that are already operational. The process of applying for the incentives may also time consuming, as noted by one of the BEAs:

> *"When customers, business owners, reach out for incentives on HVAC equipment, we direct them to the application and tell them what documents we require. It sort of falls off after that, because it's like, "Great, just something else for me to fill out and then submit whenever I have time, when I'm already stretched for time running a business and managing my people."*

A leader in Monmouth echoed this notion, mentioning it's difficult to get businesses and institutions to slow down long enough for them to help identify or pursue projects.

Overall satisfaction with AIC is high and, as such, likely not a barrier to participation. Surveyed organizations report high levels of satisfaction with Ameren Illinois, with most reporting they were "completely" or "mostly" satisfied with Ameren Illinois (Figure 35). Of the respondents who expressed moderate or low levels of satisfaction (providing a rating of "somewhat," "slightly," or "not at all satisfied") with AIC, over half (24 of 46) mentioned they were dissatisfied with AIC because of increases to electricity prices. Other reasons for dissatisfaction mentioned by respondents included customer service issues (six mentions), quality of service (four mentions), and not being aware of services (multiple mentions allowed). The remaining sixteen respondents who were dissatisfied did not provide comment.

Figure 35. Level of Satisfaction with AIC (n=280)

29%	53%	13%	3%		

■ Completely satisfied ■ Mostly satisfied ■ Somewhat satisfied ■ Slightly satisfied ■ Not at all satisfied ■ Don't know
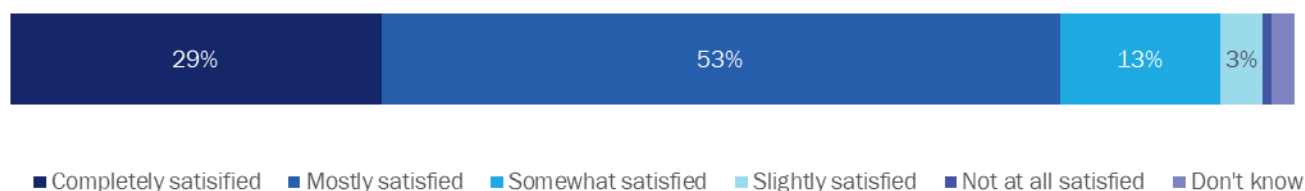
Q39. How satisfied are you overall with Ameren Illinois as your energy utility?
Note: Percentages less than 3% not shown

5.6   Marketing Education and Outreach Strategies

We asked surveyed organizations to tell us how they recall hearing about AIC offerings in the past, if applicable, and their preferences for future communications about offerings.

Surveyed organizations most often heard directly from AIC about its energy efficiency offerings. Among the 61% of respondents who reported being at least a little familiar with AIC energy efficiency offerings, the most commonly reported learning about them from their AIC bills (i.e., bill inserts), followed distantly by finding information on the AIC website (Figure 36). Contractors and other third-party sources were considerably less common sources of information overall. However, minority-led organizations are statistically more likely to report hearing about AIC offerings from local businesses, community organizations, or government or public office compared to non-minority-led organizations (25% vs. 9%).

Figure 36. Past Sources of Awareness of AIC Offerings (n=172; Multiple Responses)
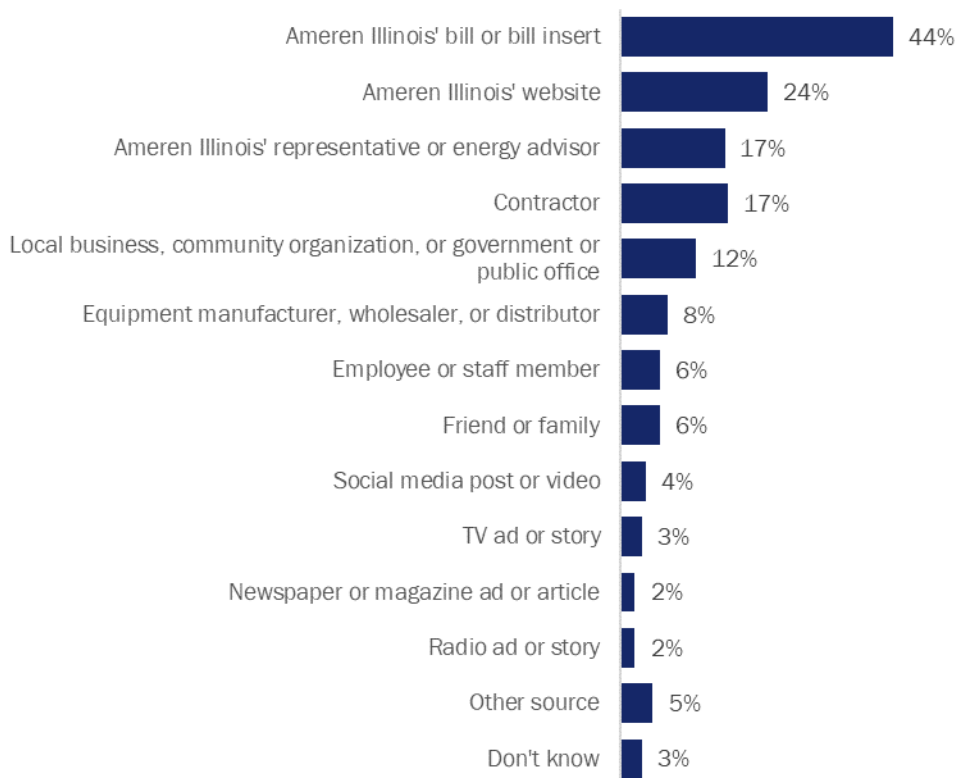
Q32. Where did you learn about Ameren Illinois' energy efficiency incentive programs?
Note: We did not ask this question to respondents who reported they were not familiar with AIC energy efficiency offerings.

Surveyed organizations had highly varied communication preferences. Surveyed organizations were mixed in terms of their preference for email versus paper-based communications (Figure 37). About half (55%) of surveyed organizations prefer paper promotion options, with a slight preference for a separate mailed letter versus a bill insert. Surveyed organizations tended not to prefer phone calls, in-person visits, or other third-party sources. However, minority-led organizations are statistically more likely to prefer receiving information via in-person visits from AIC representatives or energy advisors compared to non-minority-led organizations

(26% vs 14%). While not statistically significant, there were a few notable anecdotal differences between groups:

- Although not the top preference, organizations in the services segment group were more interested in looking up information themselves on the AIC website (19%) compared to the other core segment group (3% to 9%);

- Retail and entertainment organizations were slightly less interested in phone calls (21%) compared to other core segment groups (30% to 35%); and

- Organizations in the nonprofit, education, and religious group were more receptive to emails (62%) compared to the other two core segment groups (44% each).

Figure 37. Preferred Source of AIC Offerings Information (n=280; Multiple Response)
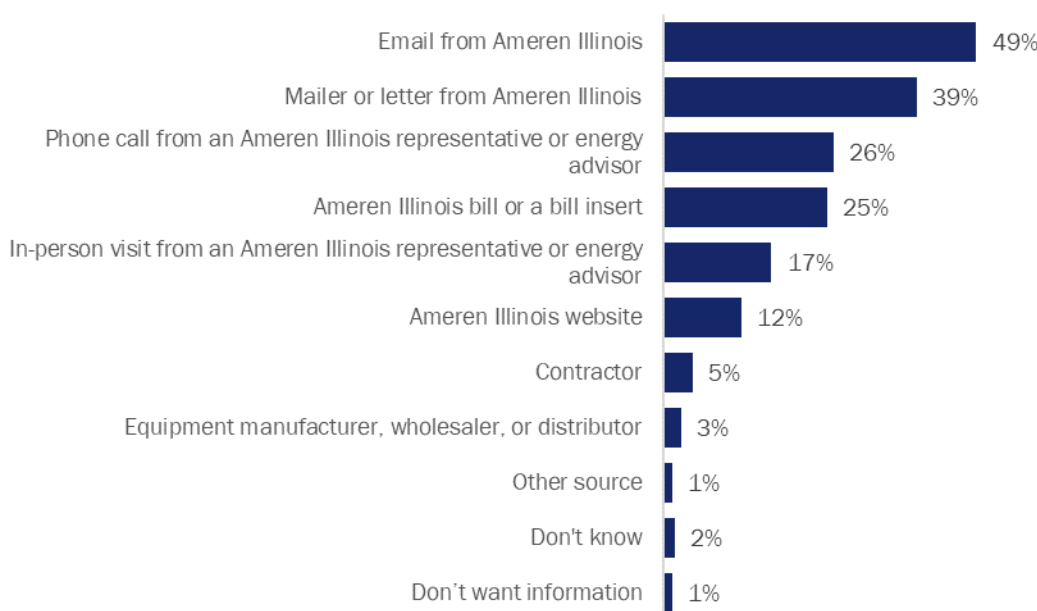
Email from Ameren Illinois	49%
Mailer or letter from Ameren Illinois	39%
Phone call from an Ameren Illinois representative or energy advisor	26%
Ameren Illinois bill or a bill insert	25%
In-person visit from an Ameren Illinois representative or energy advisor	17%
Ameren Illinois website	12%
Contractor	5%
Equipment manufacturer, wholesaler, or distributor	3%
Other source	1%
Don't know	2%
Don't want information	1%

Q38. What are the best ways for Ameren Illinois to provide your business or organization with information about its energy efficiency offerings or programs?

5.6.1 Overarching ME&O Insights from Community Leaders

One of the key goals of the community leader interviews was to get their expertise on the best ways to reach organizations in their communities. Most feedback was community-specific, by design, to identify specific partnership opportunities or ME&O strategies that may help expand AIC's reach into the selected Empower Communities. Multiple leaders emphasized the importance of credibility and trust when marketing AIC offerings; however, as well as respecting organizations' time by being brief, with simple marketing messaging and collateral, and conscientious about timing (e.g., avoid rush hour). A few also specifically suggested that energy management is not a relatable concept for some organizations, as it is predicated upon an organization being very stable with a positive revenue forecast, which is often not the case in these communities; or for small businesses in general. They said that some of these businesses or CSIs are not financially stable and, as such, are likely more reactive, replacing equipment as needed, rather than apt to

proactively manage their energy use. As such, a few leaders suggested relying less on the concept of energy management and more on potential cost savings benefits (i.e., in dollars and cents terms; not kilowatt-hours).

By far, the most common piece of advice from community leaders was that marketing through existing chambers of commerce, local government offices, and/or established CSIs, such as those related to sports, education, and/or religion, could increase AIC's reach and credibility in the community. The remainder of this section presents community-specific advice from leaders on how best to reach organizations in their community.

The next four sections present specific suggestions that community leaders had for how to best engage with their communities. Taking both these insights and other survey results into consideration, we provide our conclusions and recommendations on community-specific engagement strategies in Chapter 6.2.

5.6.2   Decatur

Leaders had the following suggestions for improved community engagement strategies in Decatur:

- **Time in-person visits carefully and emphasize convenience in marketing:** The importance of timing and convenience was clearly conveyed in several interviews. One leader said if AIC representatives are planning to visit, it is best to visit during slow hours so that the staff may have a minute to talk, otherwise set an appointment. Furthermore, this leader suggested that SBDI can be a successful model because the Program Ally does a lot of work on behalf of the organization owner. However, you first need to organization to engage and agree to participate. Another leader reinforced this point, saying that emphasizing both the low/no-cost and convenience elements of offerings is important for getting organizations interested in the beginning. Further, two interviewees alluded to people being overloaded with information from all the various sources of communication, with one stating that short, clear, concise messaging is needed.

- **Focus on building trust:** Two leaders suggested that building on trusted relationships and/or referral-based marketing were the best strategies for AIC offering recruitment. Two other leaders mentioned that there is some skepticism about AIC's motivations in providing energy efficiency offerings. Specifically, they said it's not always clear to community members why AIC would want them to use less energy (i.e., they believe that energy use is tied to utility profits) or how the AIC funds the offerings (i.e., through charges on their AIC bill). Therefore, educational material that discusses these topics could be helpful for building trust in this community.

- **Attend key Decatur Chamber of Commerce events:** To improve AIC's ability to reach small businesses and institutions, one interviewee suggested increased interaction with the Decatur Regional Chamber of Commerce, perhaps identifying an individual who can regularly act as an AIC representative or liaison to the chamber leadership and members. Another interviewee mentioned the Chamber as a trusted entity in Decatur. One leader mentioned that there are two marketing opportunities in Decatur that might be worthwhile for AIC to attend: the Decatur Chamber Business Expo and the Business Breakfast. The Business Breakfast occurs on the first Wednesday of each month whereby business professionals meet for breakfast, network, and listen to invited speakers. This breakfast is sponsored by the Decatur Regional Chamber of Commerce.

5.6.3   East St. Louis

Leaders had the following suggestions for improved community engagement strategies in East St. Louis:

- **Partners with the religious and education-focused community organizations:** Several leaders highlighted the overall importance and influence of churches and educational programs in East St. Louis, such as the local Head Start program that is run by Southern Illinois University (SIU) Edwardsville (which has a local office in East St. Louis).[17] Additionally, one leader mentioned that sororities and fraternities play a large role in the community, especially in schools, but are often underrecognized contributors to the community. AIC could work on developing relationships with local chapters of fraternities or sororities, such as the Delta Sigma Theta Sorority – East St. Louis Chapter, for outreach opportunities to alumnae as well as to build their workforce development program.

- **Use mission-oriented messaging:** One leader shared that much of what the nonprofits do is mission oriented (i.e., out of the goodness of their hearts); not with economic motivations. They suggested that focusing on social or philanthropic motivations was critical to aligning AIC messaging with the missions of influential organizations in the community, which may create partnership opportunities.

- **Invest in an incubator space:** Considering the acute need to grow the business community in East St. Louis, one non-traditional opportunity a leader suggested was for AIC to help fund or renovate an incubator space, which could be a two- or three-story building available for rent for nonprofits and small businesses.

- **Create a local commercial:** When thinking of past successful marketing campaigns, one leader mentioned a successful commercial that was frequently aired in East St. Louis, called "East of St. Louis." The leader said the commercial got a lot of airplay and has strong viewership among East St. Louis residents, but it did not seem to actually highlight any local East. St. Louis businesses, organizations, or residents. The leader described wanting to see more local commercials, but with better representation of the East. St. Louis community.

5.6.4   Monmouth

Leaders had the following suggestions for improved community engagement strategies in Monmouth:

- **Create credibility and leverage word-of-mouth marketing:** Several leaders mentioned that credibility was listed as a big factor to increasing participation. Word of mouth is important, especially recommendations from local businesses and organizations who have been around for a while and are trusted. One leader emphasized that word-of-mouth was "going to carry more weight than anything else" in a small town.

- **Establish the presence of a go-to AIC representative in town:** Community leaders suggested that AIC needs to 'show up' in this community, (i.e., have some sort of regular presence or representation at community events). One leader explained that there previously was an AIC facility in town, but now it is over 20 miles away and it does not appear that there is any AIC representation at community meetings. To this point, they said:

  > *I think it would be very helpful if we could get more of a personal touch from Ameren. They used to have a facility here and now everything comes out of Galesburg which is 20 miles away. They don't really have a community representative. I have been here*

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[17] Southern Illinois University Edwardsville. "Head Start/Early Head Start." *East St. Louis Center: Our Programs."* Accessed: March 21, 2022. https://www.siue.edu/eslc/programs/head-start/.

four and a half years and I wouldn't know who to call to try to get someone engaged... it would really be nice, even if they didn't live in the community, but they were regularly here attending some of these community meetings.

■ **Focus on places where people congregate:** One leader suggested that AIC could have a large impact by meeting people 'where they are at'—for example, in the parking lot at Smithfield (one of the biggest employers in the community) or a sports event, where there would be a lot of visibility. This leader also mentioned that the Monmouth College football and soccer games are widely attended by the community at large.

5.6.5 Southern Rural Communities

Leaders had the following suggestions for improved community engagement strategies in SRC.

■ **Leverage word of mouth and trusted messengers**: Similar to Monmouth and Decatur, several SRC leaders mentioned that word-of-mouth is one of the most effective strategies, especially when coming from a trusted messenger. In general, leaders reported chambers of commerce to be good, trusted messengers. One leader mentioned that the local Anna chamber may have struggled with ME&O in the past, but they are currently trying to revamp efforts with a digital marketing campaign; redoing their website and taking more video/photos of events. One leader specifically suggested connecting with the Small Business Development Center at Shawnee Community College and educating their advisors on the availability of AIC's offerings. That way, when they are advising businesses, they can promote AIC offerings. Other trusted organizations located or operating in SRC that leaders mentioned were the Anna City Hall; Arrowleaf (a local organization focused on behavioral health/community health); One Shawnee (a nonprofit focused on the revitalization of Southern Illinois); and the Alexander County chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) (which also holds events in Pulaski County, according to one leader).

■ **Don't rely on the same marketing tactics used in larger cities:** One leader suggested that AIC needed a new approach to marketing in SRC. They mentioned that the current approach for energy conservation marketing is to go where you can get the biggest bang for your buck (i.e., where the most businesses are), but that approach is not realistic or cost-effective when trying to reach underserved communities in this spread-out rural area.

■ **Invest in marketing**: One interviewee suggested AIC needed a new approach to marketing in SRC. They mentioned that the current approach for energy conservation marketing is to get the biggest bang for your buck, but that approach is not sufficient when trying to reach underserved communities in this rural area.

■ **Focus on canvassing or other very brief in-person interactions:** One leader mentioned that having "boots on the ground" is important in the SRC. As an example, they described their experience with a challenging media campaign their organization was conducting and how personally bringing flyers to the customer (instead of mailing it) worked better, as an example of what AIC could consider:

...We had sent social media posts until we were blue in the face and we sent out everybody a flyer on this program that we've been pushing lately, but we've had more attention by us literally walking in the door with the flyer going, "We just want to make sure you were aware of this program."

6.   Conclusions and Recommendations

One of the key goals of this research was to identify tailored, community-specific strategies for reaching small businesses and CSIs in each of the four selected Empower Communities. Discussion with community leaders uncovered a plethora of rich information about these communities and revealed there are unique barriers as well as partnership and community engagement strategies that warrant AIC's consideration. At the same time, the results of this study show that businesses and CSIs across these four communities are starting their energy efficiency journey with AIC from a fundamentally similar place: they are largely unaware or unfamiliar with the AIC Business Program and, once they know about it, there is only moderate interest in participating.

AIC's Small Business Initiative offerings directly address the systems that surveyed organizations' typically think use the most energy and/or need upgrades (lighting, weatherization, and HVAC), but the upfront cost to participate (even with significantly reduced co-pays), time, and competing priorities are major barriers to getting organizations to act on the opportunity to reduce their energy costs. These barriers are well-known to AIC staff and their local partners on the ground, who reported encountering these barriers on a daily basis as they attempt to recruit organizations into the Business Program.

Further, we conclude that the overarching mission of the MDI, and the specific strategies of the MDAP, generally align with what community leaders believe will be most successful: find local community partners; establish presence and build AIC's reputation in the community; and play a role in economic revitalization and the development of local workforces. Each community requires unique approaches to achieve these goals, but these fundamental tenets hold across all four communities we studied.

In addition to identifying how AIC can increase awareness of its energy efficiency offerings, we designed this research to explore the root causes of barriers to participation. Our survey found that organizations in these communities generally know there something more they can do to manage energy costs and realize these costs have a considerable impact on their bottom line. They tend to think of energy bills as somewhat out of their control, like a supply chain issue or a fixed cost; however, and not something they can prioritize dealing with when they have limited extra revenue or could otherwise invest that money into more goods and services. This is especially true for nonprofit organizations and other CSIs, who need to prioritize every bit of funding they can to further their mission and services to the community.

We also found that there is a need for AIC to prioritize certain types of organizations that struggle with energy-related issues much more than others; a fundamental tenet of the MDAP and something AIC has already begun to do by waiving SBDI co-pays for some types of organizations. In particular, this study found that minority-led and women-led organizations face more severe energy-related challenges than their counterparts on a number of levels: they report major difficulties affording their energy costs and more frequently deal with HCS issues (like thermal comfort and mold or pests). Critically, while relatively rare, they are also more likely to take more drastic steps to cope with (rather than directly reduce) their energy costs, such as not hiring the additional staff they need, laying off employees, or reducing employee compensation; strategies an organization might take to deal with operational costs that are out of their control. This latter finding highlights the potential socio-economic benefits for the Empower Communities as a whole if AIC is successful in expanding the reach of the Business Program.

Finally, CSIs, particularly those in the nonprofit, education, and religious core segment group, stood out as primed for participation in the Business Program. Compared to small businesses, the CSIs we surveyed tend to be located in older buildings; are more inclined to think there is more they can do to upgrade equipment or manage energy use; have historically sought outside financial assistance more often; and are more interested in participating in AIC's offerings. Serving CSIs in these communities will also allow AIC to naturally target priority demographic groups, as CSIs are more likely than small businesses to be minority- or women-led

organizations. Despite this opportunity, like small businesses, CSIs have limited funds to invest in energy upgrades, and they also bring some unique challenges: CSIs were statistically more likely than small businesses to report a lack of decision-making power or difficulties getting approval for upgrades.

6.1 Key Findings and Recommendations

We begin with a set of overarching key findings and recommendations for improving AIC's reach into the four Empower Communities, and then follow with more specific recommendations for community engagement approaches in each community.

- **Finding 1:** Organizational ownership and rental situations are not common barriers to energy upgrades or AIC offering participation for most organizations. Most respondents independently own or operate their organizations (94%); own their building or facility (71%); and occupy the entire address (80%). Decision-making power, more specifically the ability to get approval for upgrades, was also not a major barrier for most organizations, although it was more often a barrier for CSIs (48%) than small businesses (22%).

- **Finding 2:** Awareness is by far the largest barrier to AIC offering participation; about four in five surveyed organizations have limited or no familiarity with AIC's Business Program. When we asked about communication preferences regarding energy efficiency offerings, surveyed organizations were fairly mixed in their preferences, though they mostly preferred paper (i.e., hard-copy) (55%) or email (49%). A mailed letter (39%) was the more popular paper option, compared to a bill insert (25%). Only about a fifth of respondents (17%) preferred an in-person visit, but some community leaders emphasized that boots on the ground and quick in-person visits (e.g., to drop off a flyer) can still be an effective way, and sometimes the only reliable way, to reach organizations. Leaders also mentioned the importance of word-of-mouth and credible messengers.

  - <u>Recommendation:</u> Continue to use a mixture of ME&O tactics, with multiple touch points, including email, direct mail, in-person visits and phone calls. AIC should continue to rely on input from their BEAs, SBEAs, CRCs, Program Allies, and other on-the-ground partners to guide their ME&O strategies for individual communities.

  - <u>Recommendation:</u> AIC could consider a mailed letter, separate from an AIC bill, that is focused on a specific offering, like SBEP. Similarly, canvassing with a flyer about offerings may be another effective strategy in some communities. To the extent possible, we recommend targeting mailers to CSIs and minority-led organizations. Additionally, we recommend including language in AIC collateral that speaks to these organizations' missions or the needs of their community; as well as testimonials from other local organizations, or similar organizations in other communities, that have participated.

  - <u>Recommendation:</u> Continue to pursue new community partnerships in these four Empower Communities, with a broad set of organizations that serve both businesses and residents, such as nonprofits, churches, and chambers of commerce. We outline a number of community-specific ME&O and partnership opportunities later in this section.

- **Finding 3:** Prioritization is a major barrier for organizations, even after they are made aware of the offerings. Most surveyed organizations acknowledge a need to make some additional energy efficiency upgrades (66%), and to a lesser degree (51%) some energy management changes at their facility. However, only about a third (34%) say they are likely to make upgrades or energy management changes (31%) in the next two years. About two-thirds said managing energy costs is a mid-tier or low priority, although most surveyed organizations report that energy costs have at least a moderate impact on their operating budgets, revenue, or profits. Further, about two-thirds of survey respondents

(69%) say have limited or no control over the energy costs, which possibly exacerbates this sentiment. Minority-led organizations and CSIs are statistically more likely than their counterparts to report their organization would be extremely or very likely to make upgrades in the next two years (47% and 55%, compared to 30% vs. 28%, respectively). Further, minority-led organizations were particularly interested in improving energy management (61% reporting extremely or very likely to take actions).

- ■ Recommendation: Increase emphasis within Business Program ME&O efforts on targeting CSIs and minority-led organizations, as these organizations are generally more interested in participating in AIC programs and making changes to how they manage energy use. They are also more inclined to seek outside financial assistance to address energy costs, compared to their counterparts. As such, these organizations may be the key to expanding overall participation in the Business Program; but AIC must first increase awareness of their offerings among them.

■ **Finding 4:** In addition to competing priorities, cost, limited knowledge, and organizational policies are the most common barriers to making energy efficient upgrades or energy management changes. Among surveyed organizations that were unlikely to make energy upgrades in the next two years, key barriers include financial concerns, primarily upfront cost (67%); limited knowledge of energy efficiency options (55%); and organizational policy challenges, such as preference to avoid early replacement (52%). Many community leaders, including AIC BEAs and SBEAs, emphasized that even the relatively small co-pays for SBDI may be too much for organizations to afford; and that organizations often have little time to spare to think about or participate in an AIC offering. Among those who were unlikely to make energy management changes in the next two years, simply not knowing what to do and being unable to change some equipment settings or controls (45% each) were the most common barriers. Only about a quarter (26%) said improving energy management wouldn't be worthy the inconvenience.

- ■ Recommendation: Continue to keep SBDI co-pays as low as possible to address the upfront cost hurdle to participation but seek other opportunities to overcome priority, knowledge, and time barriers. Virtual Commissioning may be part of the solution, as it is no-cost and relatively unobtrusive (involvement-wise) to organizations; identifies low- to no-cost energy management opportunities; and can then serve as a first step into a larger journey through the Small Business Initiative.

- ■ Recommendation: Emphasize the availability of various types of controls upgrades when marketing SBDI. These offerings may be of greater interest to minority-led organizations or predominately non-White communities, such as East St. Louis or certain towns in the SRC, like Mounds.

- ■ Recommendation: When marketing SBDI, highlight the convenient, turnkey nature of the offering: the organization does not need to have any starting knowledge about what needs to be done; the Program Ally and/or SBEA will guide them through all the technology and energy management solutions that are relevant to their organization; and the Program Ally handles all the paperwork.

■ **Finding 5:** The current list of eligible SBDI and SBEP measures is highly aligned with the end-uses that are top of mind for organizations. Heating (75%), cooling (74%), and lighting (71%) systems are the "big energy users" that most surveyed organizations mentioned; and weatherization (73%) was the most common energy upgrade opportunity that surveyed organization knew could be made. About three-quarters (73%) of organizations in the nonprofit, education, and religious group mentioned kitchen and cooking equipment as a big energy user (twice as often as the other core segment groups); and, within this group, 10 of 17 churches mentioned it.

- ■ Recommendation: Continue with the core set of lighting, HVAC, and weatherization measures offered through SBDI and SBEP, as many customers know these systems use a lot of energy. AIC should consider focusing more on SBEP's weatherization offerings in their ME&O efforts in

Empower Communities. In this regard, AIC is already planning a concerted effort to promote SBEP specifically within Empower Communities in 2022; and these results support that strategy.

- ■ **Recommendation:** Promote food service equipment upgrade offerings specifically to nonprofit organizations, small educational facilities (e.g., daycare centers), and religious organizations like churches.

- ■ **Finding 6:** Minority-led organizations, women-led organizations, and CSIs are more impacted by energy costs and/or energy-related HCS issues than their counterparts, justifying their prioritization in the MDAP. Minority-led organizations are statistically more likely to report that energy costs have a large or moderate impact on their on their organizations' finances compared to non-minority-led organizations (79% vs. 59%); as do CSIs (78%) compared to small businesses (60%). Across the board, both minority-led and women-led organizations are also much more likely to face significant energy-related HCS challenges, such as thermal comfort issues; mold, mildew, and pest issues; and optimal lighting or equipment safety issues.

  - ■ **Recommendation:** Continue to prioritize minority-led organizations, women-led organizations, and CSIs more generally through the MDAP and Small Business Initiative. AIC has set aside some limited funding in the past to waive co-pays for SBDI for minority-led organizations and several types of CSIs but should consider whether it could expand its current definition of CSIs that qualify.

  - ■ **Recommendation:** The Empower Communities index should continue to prioritize communities with relatively large populations of non-White and income qualified residents, as these communities are likely to also include relatively large numbers of minority-led organizations and CSIs.

  - ■ **Recommendation:** Include non-residential ownership demographics in the Empower Communities index, focused on minority-led and women-led organizations. Alternatively, create a non-residential version of the Empower Communities index that specifically informs Business Program targeting. The proposed small business general population survey for 2022 may present an opportunity to identify concentrations of women- and minority-led organizations; and/or supplement existing census data on these groups.

6.2   Community-Specific Conclusions and Recommendations

We offer the following conclusions and recommendations specific to each of the four selected Empower Communities, based on information provided by community leaders.

- ■ **Decatur** has plentiful opportunities for growing Business Program participation: it is one of the largest cities in AIC's territory but less than a fifth (14%) of business customers in Decatur have participated in an AIC Initiative. Community leader–identified barriers to participation are consistent with research findings from across the energy efficiency industry: time, knowledge, upfront cost, and in some cases skepticism about the offerings present the largest barriers. Compared to other communities included in the study, however, Decatur leaders placed greater emphasis on being "too busy" to participate. This suggests that time constraints may be a particularly acute barrier for businesses in Decatur, and larger cities in general, with relatively faster-paced customer traffic and more intense business competition. Leaders emphasized building trust, careful attention to the timing of engagement (i.e., avoiding rush hours), and establishing a presence at Decatur Chamber of Commerce events as keys to successful engagement in the community.

  - ■ **Recommendation:** Business Program messaging should emphasize convenience, the ease of participation, and/or concierge-like elements of offerings. For example, mentioning that the

Program Ally can take care of most of the SBDI paperwork, or that Virtual Commissioning requires no on-site work and very little involvement by the organization, beyond giving approval to analyze the usage data, until the results are ready would likely resonate. Consider deprioritizing ME&O efforts such as emails and in-person visits to businesses, as email may get lost in inboxes and visits may be seen as disruptive to some busy organizations. A carefully timed visit, avoiding rush hours, may be appropriate but the interaction should be brief.

◼ Recommendation: Consider ways to increase word-of-mouth marketing, such as developing testimonials based on the positive experience of Decatur businesses; or possibly offering an incentive to past participants who refer other business customers. Messaging in testimonials should emphasize convenience, legitimacy, and assistance with the technical details.

◼ Recommendation: Expand AIC's partnership or involvement with the Decatur Regional Chamber of Commerce.[18] AIC is already listed on the Chamber's website as a "Business Partner" but there may be additional opportunities to increase presence at the Chamber, such as assigning a liaison to regularly attend the Business Breakfasts (held the first Wednesday of each month); or the Annual Business Expo. The Chamber website also include a page on Workforce Education and Training, as well as one on "Money Saving Programs," which already mentioned a local energy co-op to reduce rates but could also potentially include information about AIC's offerings.

◼ Recommendation: Explore partnership opportunities with the Economic Development Corporation of Decatur-Macon County;[19] one of the community leaders we interviewed. The Corporation is a nonprofit organization dedicated to attracting and supporting the expansion and retention of businesses in Decatur. For example, their website includes links to a number of different informational and financial incentive resources available to businesses, but AIC's Business Program offerings are currently not listed on the website generally; or on the "utilities" page.[20] Further, the Corporation conducts their own demographic and market research and, as such, could potentially be a local research partner for AIC.

◼ **East St. Louis** has perhaps the most challenged business community among the four Empower Communities in the study but may also present the greatest opportunity to reach CSIs and minority-led organizations eager to participate in AIC offerings. There are many nonprofits and educational facilities operating in the community; and leaders noted that churches, as well as sororities and fraternities, play influential roles in the community. The major historical socio-economic challenges in the city, combined with many old, abandoned, or decaying buildings ripe for renovation, make the upfront costs of upgrades a particularly strong barrier for this community. Despite the potential demand for AIC offerings among many of the organizations in East St. Louis, there is also a critical supply issue: leaders mentioned the city lacks a qualified local energy workforce; and about half (49%) of surveyed East St. Louis organizations said that had difficulty finding qualified contractors. Despite significant struggles, there is a strong sense of community and hope for the future in East St. Louis. Leaders told us the city is undergoing a concerted economic revitalization effort, with many incubators and startup accelerators, and they saw opportunities for AIC to be a part of that future by supporting new small businesses and helping to build a local energy workforce.

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[18] Decatur Regional Chamber of Commerce. "Welcome to the Decatur Regional Chamber of Commerce." Last Accessed: March 23, 2022. https://www.decaturchamber.com/.

[19] Economic Development Corporation of Decatur and Macon County. "Economic Development Corporation: Decatur, Macon County, Illinois." Last Accessed: March 25, 2022. https://www.decaturedc.com/.

[20] Economic Development Corporation of Decatur and Macon County. "Utilities: Economic Development Corporation." Last Accessed: March 25, 2022. https://www.decaturedc.com/utilities/.

- ■ Recommendation: Consider increasing the number of SBDI mini grants available specifically to East St. Louis organizations. These grants are currently available for certain types of organizations, including nonprofits and minority-owned businesses, and cover 100% of the SBDI co-pay.

- ■ Recommendation: Pursue partnerships with faith-based (e.g., religious-affiliated nonprofits, churches) and education-focused organizations. Ideally, these partnerships should strive to build deeper relationships than an "in-kind" partnership but, when co-branding or distributing collateral is included, focus on messaging that highlights areas of alignment between AIC's philanthropic goals and the broader missions of the partner organizations. Furthermore, consider a pilot that provides energy upgrades to faith-based organizations. If they have had positive experiences with AIC initiatives, leaders of churches and religious organizations may be willing to serve as program advocates, sharing their experiences with other faith-based organizations and their congregations.

- ■ Recommendation: Consider opportunities to increase the size of scholarships to students from East St. Louis through the MDI. Since 2018, the MDI has provided over 100 scholarships to students, typically amounting to a few thousand dollars each. Larger or "full" scholarships that pay the entire cost for an energy-related education may help address the particularly acute need to grow a qualified workforce in East St. Louis. One potential strategy would be to set up a scholarship program with the Greater East. St. Louis Community fund, one of the community leaders we interviewed, whose mission is to provide college scholarships to low-income and first-generation college students.[21]

- ■ Recommendation: Explore the benefits of partnerships with well-known local fraternities or sororities, for example, the Delta Sigma Theta Sorority – East St. Louis Chapter.[22] Such partnerships could create opportunities to connect with alumnae at local organizations, as well as connect current students with career or internship opportunities in the energy industry. Partnering with a sorority would help AIC reach women-led organizations, in particular.

- ■ Recommendation: Identify and invest in incubator spaces or startup accelerators to help revitalize the East St. Louis community while also building AIC's reputation and awareness of their philanthropic goals. While this idea may not be a direct opportunity to increase participation, in such a model, the small businesses or CSIs renting the space or that benefit from the startup accelerator could serve as trusted AIC ambassadors to other organizations.

- ■ **Monmouth** is a small college town that leaders said is in the upswing of recovery, pulling itself out of historical socio-economic challenges related to the closure of the Maytag plant (previously one of the town's largest employers) and major food insecurity issues. This recovery is supported by a growing immigrant population attracted to big local employers, like Smithfield. Leaders emphasized several strategies they think are especially important in a small town: establish local presence; identify a well-known individual who can provide credible information on AIC offerings; meet people where they are at, such as downtown and the local football games; and encourage word-of-mouth promotion. There are currently no MDI partners in Monmouth. As such, getting a foothold in this community through a few local organizations should be a high priority for the MDAP.

  - ■ Recommendation: Consider messaging that connects the spirit of economic revitalization and growth in Monmouth with energy efficiency upgrades; and appeal to sense of conservation and investment in the community.

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[21] Greater East Saint Louis Community Fund. "Scholarships." Last Accessed: March 25, 2022. https://estlfund.org/scholarships/.
[22] Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc., East St. Louis Alumnae Chapter. "Welcome." Last Accessed: March 23, 2022. https://www.dsteslac.org/.

- ■ Recommendation: Ask organizations who participate and have a positive experience to spread the word. This could be done, for example through testimonials, co-attending events with past participants, or asking participants to put visible signage near their storefront during, and for a set time after, project work. The latter strategy may be particularly effective in the Monmouth Downtown Square.

- ■ Recommendation: Expand the use of non–English language advertisements and promotion, prioritizing Spanish, French, and possibly multiple Chin languages.[23] AIC's BEA and SBEAs, as well as local organizations, like the Jamieson Community Center (one of the leaders we interviewed) can help AIC pinpoint the neighborhoods or areas of the community where in-language ME&O may be most needed. For example, one leader mentioned that the Monmouth College soccer games have wide attendance among primarily Spanish-speaking residents.

- ■ Recommendation: Focus "out-of-home/business" ME&O (i.e., visual advertisement found outside of the home or business, like billboards, signage, or booths) in areas of high resident traffic, such as Downtown Square; the Monmouth College Stadium; or even outside major places of employment, like Smithfield.

- ■ Recommendation: Explore partnership opportunities with the Jamieson Community Center, which is a nonprofit organization whose mission is to connect residents with available programs and social services.[24] While they have a particular focus on increasing food security and supporting child education, the Center is promoting a wide range of other assistance: for example, with water bills, school supplies, and prescription drugs. The Center representative we interviewed said that promoting AIC's Business and Residential Program offerings, particularly the Income Qualified Initiative, would fit well within their existing services.

■ **The SRC**, like much of Southern Illinois, is a tapestry of diverse circumstances and needs. From the larger, relatively more prosperous, and predominately White towns of Anna and Vienna to the smaller, poorer, and predominately Black or Hispanic villages in Pulaski County, this region defies a one-size-fits-all solution. However, a few cross-cutting challenges and opportunities weave the community together: the region lacks a qualified workforce in many industries, as younger generations leave the area; there is a feeling of disconnectedness with the rest of Illinois; and roughly half the population is income qualified. There are currently no MDI partnerships in the SRC, and our survey found that familiarity with AIC offerings was lower among SRC respondents than for any other community. According to leaders, this is driven by a "Swiss cheese" patchwork of electric co-operatives in the region, making it unclear where to get support; the lack of AIC Program Allies (but not local contractors); and de-prioritization of ME&O efforts in widespread and less populated areas (like Pulaski County) in favor of more densely packed communities with more businesses.

- ■ Recommendation: Avoid a one-size-fits-all approach to the SRC and pursue tailored solutions and local partnerships within Anna, Vienna, and Pulaski County individually. AIC may want to consider even further diversification of efforts within Pulaski County, for example, between areas with relatively more organizations and residents (like the City of Mounds) and those with relatively few (like the Village of Ullin).

- ■ Recommendation: Recruit the local contractor workforce into the AIC Program Ally network. AIC has recently made plans for a concerted effort in all the Empower Communities to recruit more local contractors, and we recommend giving special focus to the SRC in this regard. AIC should

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[23] Chin is a group of several distinct languages.

[24] Jamieson Community Center. "Jamieson Community Center: Monmouth Social Services and Food Pantry." Last Accessed: March 25, 2022. https://www.jamiesoncommunitycenter.org/.

also consider whether additional compensation for time spent traveling the area may be needed for Program Allies outside the immediate vicinity.

■ Recommendation: Explore partnerships opportunities with two regional organizations, One Shawnee and the Southern Five Regional Planning District. Both organizations participated in the leader interviews and had extensive knowledge of both region-wide and community-specific challenges and opportunities. One Shawnee is a relatively new organization that is attempting to establish a community fund and economic revitalization effort in Southern Illinois. They have recently completed a Community Assessment Survey and are developing a "Community Asset Map" directory of public, private, and nonprofit products and services available in the region.[25] AIC, for example, may be able to include a list of local Program Allies within this directory. Southern Five, on the other hand, specializes in lending and grant programs to support local small businesses.[26] Southern Five could, for example, encourage organizations who are applying for funding related to facility upgrades to consider installing higher efficiency equipment through AIC Business Program.

■ Recommendation: Explore partnership opportunities with Shawnee Community College in Ullin. One leader specifically suggested connecting with the Small Business Development Center at the College and educating their advisors on the availability of AIC's offerings.[27] This partnership may also create opportunities for scholarships, such as those AIC has provided in partnership with Logan College (just north of SRC; near Carbondale), recruiting local Program Allies, and otherwise developing a local energy workforce.

■ Recommendation: Focus on institutional upgrade efforts in Anna and Vienna. AIC is planning to include a special focus on homeless and women's shelter upgrades in the 2022–2025 portfolio, potentially as a sub-offering through the Multifamily Initiatives. Woman's shelters are also a specific target in the MDAP. One leader mentioned that there is a growing homelessness and drug problem in the region, centered around Anna and Vienna, and they mentioned a few prominent organizations that are addressing these issues: Arrowleaf (in Vienna) and the Bethany Village Family Crisis Resource Center (in Anna). [28,29]

■ Recommendation: Consider strategies and promotions at local schools and events. One leader mentioned that school districts, not cities, villages, or townships, comprise the most cohesive type of "community" in some parts of the SRC. As AIC seeks to engage with schools throughout the state (as part of a larger decarbonization effort in response to the Climate and Equitable Jobs Act, consider whether these efforts simultaneous create inroads to also promote the Residential and Business Programs in the SRC.

[25] One Shawnee. "Home: One Shawnee." Last Accessed: March 25, 2022. https://www.oneshawnee.com/.
[26] Southern Five Regional Planning District and Development Commission. "Services." Last Accessed: March 25, 2022. https://www.southernfive.org/services.html.
[27] Shawnee Community College. "Center for Community and Economic Development." Last Accessed: March 25, 2022. https://www.shawneecc.edu/community-services/cced.
[28] Arrowleaf. "Arrowleaf®: Growth. Community. Transformation." Last Accessed: March 25, 2022 . https://myarrowleaf.org/.
[29] Bethany Village. "Home: Bethan Village." Last Accessed: March 25, 2022. http://bvillageanna.com/.

Appendix A.   Detailed Survey Disposition

Table 2. Detailed Survey Disposition by Community and Survey Mode [a]

Disposition	Decatur			East St. Louis			Monmouth			Southern Rural Communities			Total		
	Web	Phone	Total	Web	Phone	Total	Web	Phone	Total	Web	Phone	Total	Web	Phone	Total
Original List [b]	2,973	6,308	6,482	930	3,272	3,670	315	896	911	309	1,177	1,240	4,527	11,653	12,303
Cleaned Final List [c]	832	1,034	1,866	472	754	1,226	159	272	431	196	409	605	1,659	2,469	4,128
Total Records Attempted by Method	836	1,775	2,611	472	1,190	1,662	160	414	574	197	573	770	1,665	3,952	5,617
Completes (I)	73	66	139	30	31	61	14	23	37	19	24	43	136	144	280
Break-off, Incomplete (R1) [d]	9	4	13	1	1	2	1	1	2	1	2	3	12	8	20
Refusals (UH1)	0	294	294	0	127	127	0	71	71	0	92	92	0	584	584
Nonrespondents (UH2)	687	1,191	1,878	396	839	1,235	130	245	375	161	364	525	1,374	2,639	4,013
Unknown eligibility (UO2)	0	43	43	0	9	9	0	4	4	0	9	9	0	65	65
Unused sample (UH3)	0	5	5	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	2	0	7	7
Ineligible respondent (X1) [e]	9	7	16	5	7	12	2	1	3	4	1	5	20	16	36
Ineligible business/household (X2)	0	25	25	0	14	14	0	8	8	0	7	7	0	54	54
Wrong or Bad Email/Number (X3)	58	140	198	40	162	202	13	61	74	12	72	84	123	435	558
Response Rate [f]	10.4%	4.7%	6.7%	8.1%	4.0%	5.3%	10.8%	7.4%	8.5%	12.3%	5.3%	7.3%	10.0%	4.9%	6.6%

[a.] Some in the web sample who did not respond to emails were called by phone; some in the phone sample who preferred an online survey were sent an email with the web survey link.

[b.] Some businesses/organizations in the list included both a phone number and an email address.

[c.] Businesses/organizations with an email address were placed in the web sample, all others were placed in the phone sample.

[d.] Started the survey but stopped before answering enough questions to be considered a partial or full complete.

[e.] Was not a business/organization, did not make any energy-related decisions, or was not a small/medium business/organization.

[f.] AAPOR RR4 = (I+P) / [(I+P)+(R1)+(e1*((UH1+UO1)+(e2*(UH2+UO2))+(e3*UH3)))]; e1 = [(I+P+R1) / (I+P+R1+X1)]; e2 = [(I+P+R1+UH1+UO1+X1) / (I+P+R1+UH1+UO1+X1+X2)]; e3 = [(I+P+R1+UH1+UO1+UH2+UO2+X1+X2) / (I+P+R1+UH1+UO1+UH2+UO2+X1+X2+X3)];
https://www.aapor.org/AAPOR_Main/media/publications/Standard-Definitions20169theditionfinal.pdf

Appendix B.   Survey Instrument

Screening [ASK ALL]

[ASK ALL]
S1.   First, we want to confirm a few things about you and a business or organization located in [COMMUNITY].

Ameren Illinois customer records indicate that your contact information is linked to a business or organization named [NAME] and located at [ADDRESS].

Are you affiliated with this business or organization, or with one in [COMMUNITY] or the surrounding region with a different name and/or location?

If you are affiliated with multiple businesses or organizations in the [COMMUNITY] region, please answer for the one you are most familiar with.

If the name and/or location of the business or organization we have on record is incorrect, please select the second answer and you can provide the correct name or location on the next screen.

If the location we have on record is not a business or organization, is permanently closed, etc., or if you are not affiliated with a business/organization in the region, please select the third answer.

[FORCED; SINGLE RESPONSE]

1.   You are affiliated with the business or organization we have on record → SKIP TO S1B
1.   You are affiliated with a business or organization in the region that has a different name and/or location than the one we have on record → GO TO S1A
2.   You are **not** affiliated with any business or organization in the region → THANK AND TERMINATE BELOW S1

[THANK AND TERMINATE IF 0 = 3: Thank you for letting us know. We need to hear from someone affiliated with a business or organization in [COMMUNITY]. We hope you have a great day!]

[ASK IF 0 = 2]
S1A.   What is the name and address of the business or organization you are affiliated with? [FORCED]

1.   Name: [OPEN END TEXT]
2.   Street address: [OPEN END TEXT]
3.   City: [OPEN END TEXT]

[IF 0=2, UPDATE COMMUNITY = S1A.3 ANSWER]

[ASK ALL]
S1B.   Are you involved in making decisions about managing the business or organization in [COMMUNITY]?

This can include decisions about finances, employment, clients or customers, sales and purchases, inventory, operations, maintenance, repairs or building upgrades, administration, the building(s) or facility(ies), etc.

1.   Yes [SKIP TO S4]
2.   No

[ASK IF PHONE RESPONDENT AND 0B = 2]
S2.   We need to hear from someone who is involved in making management decisions about the business or organization. This could be an owner or executive, a manager or administrator, or someone in a similar decision-making role.

Are they available to speak with me? [FORCED; SINGLE RESPONSE]

1.   Yes → LOOP BACK TO PHONE INTRODUCTION TO INTRODUCE SURVEY AND ASK 0 TO CONFIRM NEW RESPONDENT MAKES MANAGEMENT DECISIONS
2.   No → [SKIP TO S3]

[ASK IF WEB RESPONDENT AND 0B = 2]
S2A.   We need to hear from someone who is involved in making management decisions about the business or organization. This could be an owner or executive, a manager or administrator, or someone in a similar decision-making role.

Can you provide their contact info so we can send them a survey link like the one we sent you in our email? If you do not know a phone number or email, please type 'Don't know' in the space below. [MULTIPLE RESPONSE 1-3; 4 IS EXCLUSIVE]

1.   Name: [OPEN-END TEXT] → GO TO FIRST THANK AND TERMINATE BELOW S3
2.   Phone number: [OPEN-END PHONE] → GO TO FIRST THANK AND TERMINATE BELOW S3
3.   Email address: [OPEN-END EMAIL] → GO TO FIRST THANK AND TERMINATE BELOW S3
4.   No, I don't know, cannot share, or prefer not to share this information [EXLUSIVE] → GO TO SECOND THANK AND TERMINATE BELOW S3

[ASK IF S2 = 2]
S3.   Can you provide the name and contact info for someone who is involved in making management decisions for the business or organization in [COMMUNITY]? Also, what are the best the best times to reach them? [MULTIPLE RESPONSE 1-4; 5 IS EXCLUSIVE]

1.   Name: [OPEN-END TEXT] → GO TO FIRST THANK AND TERMINATE BELOW S3
2.   Phone number: [OPEN-END PHONE] → GO TO FIRST THANK AND TERMINATE BELOW S3
3.   Email address: [OPEN-END EMAIL] → GO TO FIRST THANK AND TERMINATE BELOW S3
4.   [DISPLAY IF PHONE RESPONDENT] Best times to contact: [OPEN END TEXT] → GO TO FIRST THANK AND TERMINATE BELOW S3
5.   No, I don't know, cannot share, or prefer not to share this information [EXLUSIVE] → GO TO SECOND THANK AND TERMINATE BELOW S3

[THANK AND TERMINATE IF S3 = 1-4 OR S2A = 1-3: Thank you for sharing their contact information. We'll reach out to them to complete the survey. If you can, let them know that we'll be trying to connect. Have a great day!]

[THANK AND TERMINATE IF S3 = 5 OR S2A=4: Thank you for letting us know and we hope you have a great day!]

[ASK ALL]
S4.　　How would you describe the sector(s) your business or organization is in? *Please select all that apply.* [IF PHONE RESPONDENT, DISPLAY: *INTERVIEWER: Read descriptions/examples as needed*]. [FORCED; MULTIPLE RESPONSE; RANDOMIZE 1-16]

　　1.　　**Retail** (department stores, hardware stores, and specialty stores, pharmacies, etc.)
　　2.　　**Personal services** (salons, barbers, dry cleaners, laundromats, car washes, pet groomers, taxis, etc.)
　　3.　　**Health** or **medical services** (medical, dental, veterinarian, and counseling offices, hospitals, and laboratories)
　　4.　　**Professional** or **trade services** (real estate, property, mechanic, landscaping, construction, tax, banking, insurance, legal, IT, etc. services <u>in the private sector</u>)
　　5.　　**Government** or **public administration** (offices and departments <u>in the public sector</u>)
　　6.　　**Restaurants** or **food services** (cafes, delivery, catering, etc.; <u>do not</u> include industrial-scale food processing or preparation)
　　7.　　**Housing** (rental housing, senior housing, assisted living, rest homes, multifamily properties, etc.)
　　8.　　**Education or childcare** (colleges, trade schools, universities, pre-K, K-12, nurseries, etc.)
　　9.　　**Warehousing, distribution,** or **wholesale** (storage rentals, cold storage and delivery, bulk sales, etc.)
　　10.　　**Grocery store, supermarket,** or **convenience store** (including gas stations)
　　11.　　**Lodging** (hotel, motel, bed and breakfast, vacation rentals, etc.)
　　12.　　**Entertainment or arts** (movie theaters, concert venues, bowling alleys, gyms, etc.)
　　13.　　**Nonprofit, charity, political, religious,** or **advocacy organizations, clubs,** and **associations**
　　14.　　**Libraries, parks,** or **recreation, sports,** or **community centers**
　　15.　　**Agricultural** (farming, animal husbandry, etc.)
　　16.　　**Manufacturing** or **industrial** (including industrial-scale food processing and preparation)
　　0.　　**Other**, please specify: [OPEN-ENDED RESPONSE] [ANCHOR]
　　98.　　**Don't know** [THANK AND TERMINATE] [ANCHOR]

[ASK ALL]
S5.　　Which of the following <u>best</u> describes your job title? [FORCED; SINGLE RESPOSE]

　　1.　　Business owner, president, or CEO
　　2.　　Property owner or manager
　　3.　　Vice president, executive, or administrator
　　4.　　General or office manager
　　5.　　Facilities, operations, or maintenance manager or engineer
　　0.　　Other, please specify: [OPEN-ENDED RESPONSE]
　　98.　　Don't know
　　99.　　Prefer not to say

[ASK ALL]
S6.　　Including yourself, how many employees work for your business or organization at the location in [COMMUNITY]? *Please include full- and part-time employees and volunteers, and your best estimate is fine. [IF PHONE RESPONDENT, DISPLAY: INTERVIEWER: If the business or organization relies on volunteers, please ask for those instead of employees.]* [FORCED; SINGLE RESPOSE]

1. [NUMERICAL OPEN-END 1-99996]
99998. Don't know
99999. Prefer not to say

[ASK IF S6 = 99998 OR 99999]
S7. Does your business or organization have <u>fewer</u> than 500 employees? [FORCED; SINGLE RESPOSE]

1. Yes
2. No
98. Don't know
99. Prefer not to say

[ASK ALL]
S8. During 2020, what was the [IF S4= 5, 8, 13, OR 14, DISPLAY: annual operating budget; ELSE, DISPLAY: annual revenue] for your business or organization at the location in [COMMUNITY]? *Please only include numeric characters in your response, no commas or decimals. Your best estimate is fine.* [FORCED; SINGLE RESPOSE]

1. $[NUMERICAL OPEN-END 0-9999999996]
9999999998. Don't know
9999999999. Prefer not to say

[ASK IF S8=9999999998 OR 9999999999]
S9. Was the 2020 [IF S4= 5, 8, 13, OR 14, DISPLAY: annual operating budget; ELSE, DISPLAY: annual revenue] of your business or organization <u>less</u> than $10 million? [FORCED; SINGLE RESPOSE]

1. Yes
2. No
98. Don't know
99. Prefer not to say

[THANK AND TERMINATE IF [S6>500 OR S7>1] AND [S8>10,000,000 OR S9>1]: THANK YOU FOR YOUR FEEDBACK. WE NEED TO HEAR FROM SMALL BUSINESSES AND ORGANIZATIONS WITH FEWER THAN 500 EMPLOYEES AND/OR LESS THAN $10 MILLION IN ANNUAL REVENUE. HAVE A GREAT DAY!]

[ASK ALL]
S10. What best describes the ownership of the building(s) or space your business or organization occupies in [COMMUNITY]?

If the business or organization both owns some of the space it occupies and rents some of the space it occupies on the property, please select the first <u>and</u> second options below.

If your business or organization is part of a government or public agency and you are unsure if the building(s) is owned or rented, please select the third option below. [FORCED; MULTIPLE RESPONSE]

1. It is owned or partially owned by your business or organization
2. It is rented or leased by your business or organization
3. It is part of a government or public agency

[ASK ALL]

S11.   IS YOUR BUSINESS OR ORGANIZATION INDEPENDENTLY OWNED AND OPERATED OR IS IT part of a larger network like a franchise or chain, a government, a larger corporation, conglomeration, or other similar arrangement? [FORCED; SINGLE RESPONSE]

    1.   INDEPENDENTLY OWNED AND OPERATED
    2.   PART OF LARGER NETWORK OR GOVERNMENT

Fuels and Equipment [ASK ALL]

[ASK ALL]

Q1.   Next, we have a few questions about the energy sources and equipment your business or organization uses.

In addition to electricity, does your business or organization have **natural gas** service at its facility(ies)? [FORCED; SINGLE RESPONSE]

    1.   Yes
    2.   No
    98.   DON'T KNOW

[ASK IF S10 > 1 OR S11 = 2 (RENTS FACILITIY AND/OR BUS/ORG NOT INDEPENDENTLY OWNED)]
Q2.   Does your business or organization pay its own energy bills or are its energy bills paid by an outside entity like a property manager or owner, a corporate office or parent company, etc.? [FORCED; SINGLE RESPONSE]

    1.   Pay your own energy bills
    2.   Another entity pays the energy bills
    98.   Don't know

[ASK ALL]
Q3.   [REMOVE QUESTION BUT KEEP AS PLACEHOLDER TO PRESERVE QUESTION NUMBERING]

[ASK IF S10 > 1 OR S11 = 2 (RENTS FACILITIY AND/OR BUS/ORG NOT INDEPENDENTLY OWNED)]
Q4.   Who is responsible for making decisions about each of the following? Is it your business or organization, an outside entity like a property manager or owner, a corporate office, parent company, public agency, etc., or both? [FORCED; SINGLE RESPONSE; RANDOMIZE; 1=My business or organization only; 2=An outside entity only; 3=My business/organization for some things, an outside entity for other things; 4=Both my business/organization and an outside entity for all or most things]

    1.   Replacing, upgrading, or newly purchasing equipment for lighting, heating and cooling, water heating, kitchen appliances, etc.
    2.   Making changes or upgrades to the shell of the building(s), like replacing windows and doors, adding insulation in walls or ceilings, weather-stripping, caulking, or sealing leaks or holes, and the like

[ASK ALL]

Q5.   During a typical year, do you consider each of the following to be a **big user** of energy at your business or organization? *If your business or organization does not have the type of equipment, please indicate that.*

[IF WEB RESPONDENT, DISPLAY: *If you select 'some other equipment' by mistake, please enter 'NA' in the text box to proceed.*] [FORCED; SINGLE RESPONSE; RANDOMIZE 1-10; 1=Yes, 2=No, 97=Not applicable, don't have this equipment; 98=Don't know]

1.   Heating equipment like a furnace, boiler, heat pump
2.   Cooling equipment like central air conditioning or a window/room air conditioning unit
3.   Water heater
4.   Laundry equipment like a clothes washer and dryer
5.   Kitchen and cooking appliances like refrigerators, freezers, ovens, stoves, and dishwashers
6.   Commercial refrigeration like cold storage, a walk-in cooler or freezer, display cases
7.   Lighting equipment like indoor and outdoor fixtures, bulbs, lamps, and ballasts
8.   Compressed air equipment
9.   Equipment with motors or drives
10.   Office equipment and electronics like computers, printers, servers, TVs, and radios
0.   Some other equipment, please specify: [OPEN-ENDED RESPONSE] [ANCHOR; NOT FORCED]

Importance and Burden of Energy Costs

[ASK ALL]

Q6.   Next, we have some questions about the energy costs of your business or organization and how it manages energy usage. *Energy costs* include bills for electricity, natural gas, and any other delivered fuels like propane or oil.

During a typical year, how many energy bills do you or someone else at your location review?

Please indicate if the energy bills are combined with other overhead or operating expenses and can't be reviewed separately, or if your business or organization is unable to review any energy bills. [FORCED; SINGLE RESPONSE]

1.   Every or nearly every bill
2.   Most bills
3.   Some bills
4.   A few bills
5.   One bill
6.   None of the bills
96.   Not applicable, the energy bills are combined with other overhead or operating expenses and can't be separated
97.   Not possible, my business or organization does not see any of the energy bills
98.   Don't know

[ASK ALL]

Q7.   How much do energy costs affect the [IF S4= 5, 13, OR 14, DISPLAY: operating budget; ELSE, DISPLAY: annual revenues or profits] of your business or organization? Would you say that they have…? [FORCED; SINGLE RESPONSE]

1. A large impact
2. A moderate impact
3. A little impact
4. No impact
98. Don't know

[ASK ALL]
Q8. In general, how much of a priority are managing energy costs to your business or organization? [FORCED; SINGLE RESPOSE]

1. High priority
2. Medium priority
3. Low priority
4. Not a priority
98. Don't know

Q9. DELETED BUT PRESERVED QUESTION NUMBERING

[ASK ALL]
Q10. How concerned is your business or organization about affording its energy costs? [FORCED; SINGLE RESPONSE]

1. Extremely concerned
2. Very concerned
3. Moderately concerned
4. A little concerned
5. Not at all concerned

[ASK IF Q10 < 5]
Q11. Is there more, the same, or less concern about energy costs compared to other expenses your business or organization is responsible for? [FORCED; SINGLE RESPONSE]

1. More concern
2. About the same concern
3. Less concern

[ASK IF Q8=2-4 OR Q11=3]
Q11A. What are the higher priorities or bigger concerns than managing energy costs for your business or organization? [FORCED; SINGLE RESPOSE]

1. Please explain: [OPEN-END TEXT]
98. Don't know

[ASK ALL]
Q12. During the past two years, has your business or organization experienced a lot, some, a little, or no difficulty…? [FORCED; SINGLE RESPONSE; RANDOMIZE; 1= Lots of difficulty, 2=Some difficulty, 3=A little difficulty, 4=No difficulty, 97=Not applicable, 98=Don't know]

1.   Affording its energy costs
2.   Maintaining comfortable indoor air temperatures
3.   Operating energy-using equipment safely or replacing unsafe equipment
4.   Keeping mold, mildew, or pests such as insects, spiders, rodents out of the facility(ies)
5.   Providing optimal or high-quality lighting conditions for employees and customers

Control Over Energy Usage

[ASK ALL]
Q13.   How much control do you feel your business or organization has over how much energy it uses and pays for? [FORCED; SINGLE RESPONSE]

1.   Total or near total control
2.   A lot of control
3.   Some control
4.   A little control
5.   No control

[ASK ALL]
Q14.   Do you agree or disagree with the following challenges for controlling how much energy your business or organization uses and pays for? [FORCED; SINGLE RESPONSE; RANDOMIZE; 1=Agree, 2=Disagree, 97=Not applicable, 98=Don't know]

1.   Having customers or employees in the facility(ies) can limit how or when you can use different types of equipment like heating or cooling, lighting, loud machinery, etc.
2.   The facility(ies) and/or equipment is old, inefficient, broken, or not performing well
3.   The upfront costs or capital investment required to replace or upgrade the facility(ies) or equipment can be unaffordable
4.   Getting approval to repair or upgrade the facility(ies) and/or equipment can be difficult
5.   The employees responsible for making repairs and upgrades or for managing energy usage do not have enough time, training, information, or resources to do so
6.   Finding qualified contractors or equipment for making repairs and upgrades can be challenging
7.   Managing energy usage or making repairs and upgrades is not a high priority
8.   We sometimes don't know how to best manage our energy usage or what upgrades to make
9.   We've already done all we can do to manage and control energy usage and make upgrades

[ASK IF Q13 > 2]
Q15.   What other challenges, if any, affect how your business or organization controls its energy usage and bills? [FORCED; SINGLE RESPOSE]

1.   Please explain: [OPEN-END TEXT]
97.   No other challenges
98.   Don't know

Actions and Barriers to Afford or Reduce Energy Costs

[ASK ALL]

Q16. Has your business or organization taken any of the following actions to help afford its energy costs, reduce energy usage, or maximize comfort and safety regarding energy-using equipment? [FORCED; SINGLE RESPONSE; RANDOMIZE; 1=Yes, 2=No, 97=Not applicable, 98=Don't know]

1. Increased prices of goods or services
2. Reduced the number of employees, or postponed hiring more employees
3. Created energy-saving policies such as turning off lights or equipment when not in use
4. Purchased efficient energy equipment or appliances
5. Reduced employee pay or benefits, or postponed raises or promotions
6. Changed or streamlined production processes or operations
7. Changed hours of operation or production schedule
8. Installed new energy efficient lighting or lighting controls
9. Made improvements to the building shell (insulation, windows, weather sealing and caulking)
10. Changed the settings on the heating, cooling, or water heating equipment
11. Applied for financial loans, grants, or other assistance
12. Postponed or cancelled investments in other aspects of the business or organization

[ASK ALL]
Q17. What other actions, if any, has your business or organization taken to afford its energy costs or reduce usage? [FORCED; SINGLE RESPONSE]

1. Please explain: [OPEN END TEXT]
97. No other actions
98. Don't know

[ASK IF Q16_3, Q16_4, Q16_8, Q16_9, OR Q16_10 = 1]
Q18. Did your business or organization see a reduction in its energy usage or costs from any of the following? [FORCED; SINGLE RESPONSE; RANDOMIZE; 1=Yes, 2=No, 98=Don't know]

1. [DISPLAY IF Q16_3=1] Enacted energy-saving policies such as turning off lights or equipment when not in use
2. [DISPLAY IF Q16_4=1] Purchased efficient energy equipment or appliances
3. [DISPLAY IF Q16_8=1] Installed new energy efficient lighting or lighting controls
4. [DISPLAY IF Q16_9=1] Made improvements to the building shell (insulation, windows, weatherizing)
5. [DISPLAY IF Q16_10=1] Changed the settings on the heating, cooling, or water heating equipment

Energy Efficiency Upgrades and Barriers

[ASK ALL]
Q19. Please consider energy efficiency upgrades that could be made to your facility(ies) and equipment to reduce energy costs, such as lighting, heating and cooling, appliances, electronics, insulation, windows, etc.,

For purposes of this question, do **not** think about the costs or any other limitations to making the upgrades, just focus on what upgrades could technically be made.

How many upgrades could your business or organization make to reduce its energy costs? [FORCED; SINGLE RESPOSE]

1. A lot of upgrades could be made
2. Some upgrades could be made
3. A few upgrades could be made
4. Very few or no upgrades could be made
98. Don't know

[ASK IF Q19 = 4]
Q20. Why could very few or no upgrades be made to reduce the energy costs of your business or organization? [FORCED; SINGLE RESPOSE]

1. Please explain: [OPEN-END TEXT]
97. Most or all things are already energy efficient
98. Don't know

[ASK IF Q19 < 4]
Q21. What upgrades could your business or organization make to reduce its energy costs?

[IF WEB RESPONDENT, DISPLAY: *If you select 'something else' by mistake, please enter 'NA' in the text box to proceed.*] [FORCED; SINGLE RESPONSE; RANDOMIZE 1-6 1=Could make upgrades, have not made any, 2=Have made some upgrades but could make more, 3=Have already upgraded, 4=Not possible or desirable to upgrade, 97=Not applicable to my business or organization, 98=Don't know]

1. Convert equipment from natural gas, propane, or other fuel source to electricity
2. Replace or upgrade a **major** type of equipment with an energy efficient model, like a heating or cooling system, a water heater, an appliance, a refrigeration case or system, etc.
3. Replace or upgrade a **minor** type of equipment with an energy efficient model, like light bulbs, a thermostat, power strips, portable fans, etc.
4. Add insulation to walls, ceiling/attic, or floor
5. Weatherize the facility(ies) with weather-stripping, caulking, air sealing, etc.
6. Replace or upgrade windows
7. Something else, please specify: [OPEN END TEXT] [ANCHOR; NOT FORCED]

[ASK IF Q19 < 4]
Q22. How likely is your business or organization to make energy efficiency upgrades to the facility(ies) or equipment in the <u>next two years</u>? *Please consider all equipment, including that which will likely need to be replaced in two years.* [FORCED; SINGLE RESPONSE]

1. Extremely likely
2. Very likely
3. Somewhat likely
4. Slightly likely
5. Not at all likely
98. Don't know

[ASK IF Q19 < 4 AND Q22 =3-5]

Q23.   Are any of the following a reason for why your business or organization is not **very likely** to make energy efficiency upgrades to your facility(ies) or equipment? [FORCED; SINGLE RESPONSE; RANDOMIZE; 1=Yes, 2=No, 98=Don't know]

    1.   The upfront or out-of-pocket costs are too high
    2.   The energy savings are not big enough to justify the costs of energy efficient upgrades
    3.   The payback period for making energy efficient upgrades would be too long
    4.   Our equipment has to fail or break before it's replaced or upgraded
    5.   We prefer the lowest cost, least efficient equipment model or option
    6.   We need more information about energy efficiency options
    7.   [DISPLAY IF S10 > 1 OR S11 = 2] We must get approval from those in the business or organization who make decisions about facility or equipment upgrades

[ASK IF Q19 < 4 AND Q22 = 3-5]
Q24.   What other reasons or barriers, if any, make your business or organization not very likely to make energy efficiency upgrades? [FORCED; SINGLE RESPONSE]

    1.   Please explain: [OPEN END TEXT]
    97.   No other reasons or barriers
    98.   Don't know

Energy Efficiency Behaviors and Barriers

[ASK ALL]
Q25.   We just asked you about equipment **upgrades**. Now, please consider possible changes to how current equipment like lighting, appliances, electronics, and heating and cooling **is used** by your employees and staff that could save energy and costs.

       Some examples include changing equipment settings to operate more efficiently, using equipment less often, turning off equipment when not in use, or using equipment during times when energy prices and demand are low.

       How many of these types of actions regarding **the use** of equipment could be changed to save energy at your business or organization? [FORCED; SINGLE RESPONSE]

    1.   A lot of actions could be changed
    2.   Some actions could be changed
    3.   A few actions could be changed
    4.   Very few to no actions could be changed
    98.   Don't know

[ASK IF Q25 = 4]
Q26.   Why could very few or no actions be changed to save energy at your business or organization? [FORCED; SINGLE RESPONSE]

    1.   Please explain: [OPEN-END TEXT]
    97.   Most or all actions already save as much energy as possible
    98.   Don't know

[ASK IF Q25 < 4]

Q27.   What actions could your business or organization and its employees and staff change to save energy?

[IF WEB RESPONDENT, DISPLAY: *If you select 'something else' by mistake, please enter 'NA' in the text box to proceed.*] [FORCED; SINGLE RESPONSE; RANDOMIZE 1-7; 1=Could make changes, have not made any 2=Have made some changes but could make more, 3=Have already made changes, 4=Not possible or desirable to make changes, 97=Not applicable to my business or organization, 98=Don't know]

1.   Turn off lights or equipment when not in use during business hours
2.   Turn off or unplug all unnecessary equipment at the close of each day
3.   Change thermostat, lighting, or other equipment settings to use less energy or to low-energy mode
4.   Use equipment during times of the day when demand for and price of energy is lower
5.   Provide information and resources to employees about how they can use less energy
6.   Post flyers, bulletins, images, or other signage around the facility to remind employees about saving energy
7.   Create longer-term goals or policies that require your business or organization to save energy and/or become less energy intensive
8.   Something else, please specify: [OPEN END TEXT] [ANCHOR; NOT FORCED]

[ASK IF Q25 < 4]
Q28.   How likely is your business or organization to attempt to change **the use** of equipment to save energy during the <u>next two years</u>? *Please consider any change(s) to using equipment that would save energy.* [FORCED; SINGLE RESPONSE]

1.   Extremely likely
2.   Very likely
3.   Somewhat likely
4.   Slightly likely
5.   Not at all likely
98.   Don't know

[ASK IF Q25 < 4 AND Q28 = 3-5]
Q29.   Are any of the following a reason for why your business or organization is not **very likely** to attempt to change actions to save energy?

[IF WEB RESPONDENT, DISPLAY: *If you select 'other reason' by mistake, please enter 'NA' in the text box to proceed.*] [FORCED; SINGLE RESPONSE; RANDOMIZE; 1=Yes, 2=No, 98=Don't know]

1.   The energy savings would not be worth the inconvenience
2.   We are unable to control the actions of employees and staff
3.   We are unable to change some equipment settings, usage, or schedule
4.   Our facility(ies) could get too uncomfortable or unsafe
5.   We need more information on what actions could be taken
0.   Other reason, please specify: [OPEN-ENDED RESPONSE] [ANCHOR; NOT FORCED]

[ASK ALL]
Q30.   If your business or organization was able to reduce its energy costs, what would it likely do with the money it saves? *Please select all that apply.* [FORCED; MULTIPLE RESPONSE; RANDOMIZE 1-8] [DISPLAY IF PHONE RESPONDENT: *Interviewer: Read as needed.*]

1. Invest in the facility(ies) or equipment for repairs, upgrades, add-ons, etc.
2. Save for future investments
3. Add to profits or revenues
4. Increase employee pay or benefits
5. Hire more employees
6. Invest in marketing or advertising
7. Pay for or hire tax, legal, financial, maintenance, or other services
8. Increase services, products, or other offerings
9. Other, please specify: [OPEN END RESPONSE] [ANCHOR; NOT FORCED]

Business Program Awareness, Interest, Barriers

[ASK ALL]
Q31.   Thanks for your input so far! Next, we have some questions about Ameren Illinois' incentive offerings and programs for commercial, industrial, and public sector customers.

Ameren Illinois offers qualifying businesses and organizations incentives like rebates and discounts on a range of energy efficiency equipment upgrades, such as lighting, heating and cooling, kitchen appliances, motors, refrigeration, and more to help them save energy and money. Some of the programs also provide an energy audit, free equipment, and/or contractor expertise and support.

How familiar are you with **any** of Ameren Illinois' incentive offerings or programs for energy efficiency upgrades? [FORCED; SINGLE RESPONSE]

1. Extremely familiar
2. Very familiar
3. Somewhat familiar
4. A little familiar
5. Not at all familiar
98. Don't know

[ASK IF Q31 < 5]
Q32.   Where did you learn about Ameren Illinois' energy efficiency incentive programs? *Please select all that apply.* [FORCED; MULTIPLE RESPONSE; RANDOMIZE 1-14] [DISPLAY IF PHONE RESPONDENT: *Interviewer: Read as needed*.]

1. Ameren Illinois' website
2. Ameren Illinois' bill or bill insert
3. Ameren Illinois' representative or energy advisor
4. Contractor
5. Equipment manufacturer, wholesaler, or distributor
6. Employee or staff member
7. Friend or family
8. Website not owned or sponsored by Ameren Illinois, please specify: [OPEN END TEXT]
9. Social media post or video on Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, TikTok, etc.
10. Online ad or article
11. TV ad or story
12. Radio ad or story
13. Newspaper or magazine ad or article

14.   Local business, community organization, or government or public office
15.   Other, please specify: [OPEN END TEXT] [ANCHOR; NOT FORCED]
98.   Don't know [EXCLUSIVE] [ANCHOR]

[ASK IF Q31 < 5]
Q33.   Has your business or organization participated in or received incentives through any of Ameren Illinois' energy efficiency offerings or programs? [FORCED; SINGLE RESPONSE]

1.   Yes
2.   No
98.   Don't know

[ASK IF Q33 = 1]
Q34.   Did your business or organization see benefits, like a reduction in its energy usage or costs or an increase in comfort or safety, from the energy efficiency upgrades or services received through Ameren Illinois' energy efficiency programs? [FORCED; SINGLE RESPONSE; 1=Yes, 2=No, 98=Don't know]

1.   Yes
2.   No
3.   Possibly, it's too early to know
98.   Don't know

[ASK IF Q33 = 2]
Q35.   Why has your business or organization **not** participated in any of Ameren Illinois' energy efficiency programs? *Please select all that apply.* [FORCED; MULTIPLE RESPONSE; RANDOMIZE 1-11] [DISPLAY IF PHONE RESPONDENT: *Interviewer: Read as needed*.]

1.   Need more information about how to participate
2.   Need more information about what upgrades my business or organization could make
3.   Lack of interest in or need for participating in the programs
4.   Tried to participate in the past but my business or organization, facility, or equipment did not qualify
5.   Tried to participate in the past but it was too difficult, inconvenient, or time-consuming
6.   Rebates and discounts are too small or the payback period is too long to make it worth participating
7.   Been too busy, forgot about it, it's lower priority
8.   Waiting on COVID-19 pandemic to ease up
9.   Prefer or required to purchase a specific type or model of equipment and/or order it from specific vendors
10.   Prefer to get used, free, refurbished, or borrowed equipment from online or other sources
11.   [DISPLAY IF S10 > 1 OR S11 = 2] Unable or have not tried to get approval from those in the business or organization who make decisions about participating in programs
0.   Other, please specify: [OPEN-ENDED RESPONSE] [ANCHOR; NOT FORCED]
98.   Don't know [EXCLUSIVE]

[ASK IF Q31 = 5 OR Q33 = 1 OR (Q33 = 2 AND Q35 != 3) OR Q33=98]
Q36.   How much interest would your business or organization have in learning about and potentially participating in [IF Q33=1 OR Q35=4, INSERT: a different or the same] Ameren Illinois' energy efficiency offerings or programs? [FORCED; SINGLE RESPONSE]

1.   A lot of interest

2. Some interest
3. A little interest
4. No interest
97. [DISPLAY IF Q33=1 OR Q35=4] Not applicable, my business or organization is not eligible for participation in any programs

[ASK IF Q35 = 3 OR Q36 = 3 OR 4]
Q37. Why is your business or organization not more interested in Ameren Illinois' energy efficiency offerings or programs? [FORCED; SINGLE RESPONSE]

1. Please explain: [OPEN END TEXT]
97. All our equipment is already as energy efficient as possible
98. Don't know

[ASK ALL]
Q38. What are the best ways for Ameren Illinois to provide your business or organization with information about its energy efficiency offerings or programs? *Please select all that apply.* [FORCED; MULTIPLE RESPONSE; RANDOMIZE 1-10] [DISPLAY IF PHONE RESPONDENT: *Interviewer: Read as needed.*]

1. Ameren Illinois website
2. Ameren Illinois bill or a bill insert
3. Phone call from an Ameren Illinois representative or energy advisor
4. In-person visit from an Ameren Illinois representative or energy advisor
5. Contractor
6. Equipment manufacturer, wholesaler, or distributor
7. Email from Ameren Illinois
8. Mailer or letter from Ameren Illinois
9. Recommendation from a financial planner, accountant, tax agency, lawyer, or similar service provider your business or organization uses, please specify: [OPEN-ENDED TEXT]
10. Recommendation through another business, business or trade association, community organization, or government or public office, please specify: [OPEN-ENDED TEXT]
0. Other, please specify: [OPEN-ENDED TEXT] [ANCHOR; NOT FORCED]
98. Don't know [ANCHOR]
99. Don't want information from Ameren Illinois about its energy efficiency offerings or programs [ANCHOR]

AIC Satisfaction

[ASK ALL]
Q39. How satisfied are you overall with Ameren Illinois as your energy utility? [FORCED; SINGLE RESPONSE; DISPLAY ORDER 5 - 1]

1. Not at all satisfied
2. Slightly satisfied
3. Somewhat satisfied
4. Mostly satisfied
5. Completely satisfied
98. Don't know

[ASK IF Q39 = 1-3]
Q40.   Why are you not more satisfied with Ameren Illinois?

    1.   Please explain: [OPEN END TEXT]
    98.   Don't know

Firmographics

[ASK ALL]
Q41.   These last few questions are about your business or organization to ensure we are hearing from different types throughout the community.

What is the gender of the owner(s) or administrator(s) of your business or organization?

If the business or organization has more than one owner/administrator or a board of directors, please select all that apply. [FORCED; MULTIPLE RESPONSE] [DISPLAY IF PHONE RESPONDENT: *Interviewer: Read as needed*.]

    1.   Female
    2.   Male
    0.   Non-binary or other
    98.   Don't know [EXCLUSIVE]
    99.   Prefer not to say [EXCLUSIVE]

[ASK ALL]
Q42.   What is the race or ethnicity of the owner(s) or administrator(s) of your business or organization?

Please select all that apply for all owners/administrators or board of directors' members. [FORCED; MULTIPLE RESPONSE] [DISPLAY IF PHONE RESPONDENT: *Interviewer: Read as needed*.]

    1.   Alaska Native, American Indian, or Native American
    2.   African American or Black
    3.   Asian or Asian Indian
    4.   Hawaii Native or Pacific Islander
    5.   Hispanic or Latino/a
    6.   Middle Eastern
    7.   White or Caucasian
    0.   Other, please specify: [OPEN-ENDED RESPONSE]
    98.   Don't know [EXCLUSIVE]
    99.   Prefer not to say [EXCLUSIVE]

[ASK ALL]
Q43.   Is the owner(s) or administrator(s) of your business or organization any of the following?

Please answer for all owners/administrators or board of directors' members. [FORCED; SINGLE RESPONSE; RANDOMIZE; 1=YES, 2=NO, 98=DON'T KNOW, 99=PREFER NOT TO SAY]

    1.   Military veteran
    2.   Immigrant

    3.   LGBTQ+
    4.   Disabled

[ASK ALL]
Q44.   Does your business or organization occupy all or part of the building(s) on the property in [COMMUNITY]?

    If your business or organization occupies all of one or more buildings and part of another building(s) on the property, please select both options below. [FORCED; MULTIPLE RESPONSE]

    1.   Occupies all the building(s)
    2.   Occupies part of the building(s)
  96
[ASK ALL]
Q45.   What year did your business or organization first open in [COMMUNITY]? *Your best estimate is fine.* [FORCED; SINGLE RESPONSE]

    1.   [NUMERICAL OPEN-END 1800-2021] YYYY
    9998. Don't know

[ASK IF Q45 = 9998]
Q46.   Would you estimate that your business or organization first opened …? [FORCED; SINGLE RESPONSE]

    1.   Before 1960
    2.   Between 1960 and 1969
    3.   Between 1970 and 1979
    4.   Between 1980 and 1989
    5.   Between 1990 and 1999
    6.   Between 2000 and 2009
    7.   Between 2010 and 2019
    8.   In 2020 or 2021
    98.   Don't know

[ASK ALL]
Q47.   When your business or organization first moved into its current location, did anyone consider the energy costs of operating in the facility(ies)?

    1.   Yes
    2.   No
    98.   Don't know

[ASK ALL]
Q48.   [REMOVE QUESTION BUT KEEP AS PLACEHOLDER TO PRESERVE QUESTION NUMBERING]

[ASK ALL]
Q49.   Would you estimate the square footage (sq. ft.) of space your business or organization occupies in the building(s) in [COMMUNITY] is…? [FORCED; SINGLE RESPONSE]

    1.   Less than 500 sq. ft.

2.   500 to 999 sq. ft.
3.   1,000 to 4,999 sq. ft.
4.   5,000 to 9,999 sq. ft.
5.   10,000 to 49,999 sq. ft.
6.   50,000 to 99,999 sq. ft.
7.   100,000 or more sq. ft.
98.   Don't know

[ASK ALL]
Q50.   Does your business or organization have a <u>single location</u> or <u>multiple locations</u> in Illinois? *If your business or organization is part of a franchise, government, or something similar, please do <u>**not**</u> include locations owned or managed by those who are unaffiliated with your location.* [FORCED; SINGLE RESPONSE]

1.   Single location
2.   Multiple locations
98.   Don't know

[ASK ALL]
Q51.   Since March 2020, has your business or organization received any COVID-19 pandemic relief funds, loans, grants, or other financial assistance?

1.   Yes
2.   No
98.   Don't know

Gift Card and Closing [ASK ALL]

[ASK ALL]
Q52.   Great, that's all of our questions! Now let us get your info to send you the $30 gift card. What is a good email address where you would like us to send the gift card to? [FORCED; SINGLE RESPONSE]

1.   Email address to send gift card to: [OPEN-END EMAIL]
2.   Don't have an email address or prefer a gift card sent in the mail
97.   Don't want a gift card

[ASK IF Q52=2]
Q53.   Okay, we can mail you a gift card to your mailing address. What is your…? [FORCE 1-4 OR 97; MULTIPLE RESPONSE]

1.   Name: [OPEN-END TEXT]
2.   Street Address (include any unit, suite, or building numbers): [OPEN-END TEXT]
3.   City: [OPEN-END TEXT]
4.   State: [OPEN-END TEXT]
97.   Don't want a gift card [EXCLUSIVE]

[IF Q52=1] EMAIL_CLOSING. Within in the next two weeks, please look for an email from Tango with your $30 gift card. Tango is our gift card provider that allows you to choose from dozens of retailers and restaurants like Amazon or Starbucks, or a Visa gift card option, or a donation to a nonprofit. You can contact Morgan Parker

at morgan.parker@opiniondynamics.com with any questions or leave a message at 800-401-4577 and we'll return your call.

That's all the questions we have. Thank you very much for your participation!

[IF 0 = 1-4] MAIL_CLOSING. Within in the next four weeks, please look for a letter in the mail from Opinion Dynamics. It will include a $30 Visa gift card you can use at any businesses that accepts Visa. You can contact Morgan Parker at morgan.parker@opiniondynamics.com with any questions or leave a message at 800-401-4577 and we'll return your call.

That's all the questions we have. Thank you very much for your participation!

[IF Q52 OR 0 = 97] NOGIFT_CLOSING. Okay, that's all the questions we have. Thank you very much for your participation!

Appendix C. Community Leader Interview Guide

This appendix provides the guide for in-depth interviews with community leaders, which included a diverse range of individuals and organizations, for example, AIC SBEAs, BEAs, and CRCs; municipal leaders and state congressional representatives; a local chamber of commerce and an economic development corporation; and nonprofit organizations that serve the communities. Given the wide range of perspectives we planned to capture, we intended the questions in this guide to be high-level. Exploratory interviews are loosely structured to allow for the interviewer to adapt the line of questioning based on the specific experiences or expertise of the respondent; and to allow for the flexibility to explore topics or specific issues facing the target communities that we did not anticipate.

Introduction

Thank you again for taking the time to speak with me today about [COMMUNITY]. The ultimate goal of our conversation today will be to help Ameren Illinois further invest in your community by learning more about how to best support small businesses and community-serving institutions in [COMMUNITY]. Examples of institutions include, but are not limited to, local government-run institutions like libraries, schools, shelters, and community centers; faith-based organizations, like churches; or non-government organizations that provide critical services, likes hospitals, clinics, or other nonprofits. We would like to ask you questions about how small businesses and institutions in [COMMUNITY] think about energy savings, the main barriers they face with improving energy management, and identify opportunities for AIC to reach and support businesses and institutions through their energy efficiency offerings. While our research focuses on finding ways to help Ameren Illinois' customers improve energy management and reduce their utility bills, we're reaching out to community leaders like yourself because we want to develop a holistic understanding of the small businesses and community-serving institutions in your community, and we feel that you can contribute to our effort to paint a full picture of the community and its needs as a whole.

Ask permission of interviewee to record interviews.

Respondent Roles and Services in the Community

Q1.   To begin, could you please confirm that you are [ROLE] operating in [COMMUNITY]? How long have you been in that role?

Q2.   Can you please tell me a bit more about your role at [COMPANY/ORGANIZATION]? What services or support do you provide to small businesses and institutions in [COMMUNITY]? [IF NEEDED/RELEVANT: Are you currently or have you previously partnered with Ameren Illinois through the Market Development Initiative?]

Q3.   How would you describe the goals of your [ROLE/ORGANIZATION]? What types of clients/community members do you serve? [*Get specific details such whether they serve certain types of businesses or institutions, certain parts of the community, or certain socio-economic or ethnic groups, etc.].*

Q4.   *Does your role involve frequent outreach to small businesses and institutions? What does this entail?* What types of events or community activities does your organization sponsor or attend, if any?

Community Overview

Next, we'd like to learn more about the community in general.

Q5.   In general, what words come to mind when you think of the [COMMUNITY] community? [PROBE: what characterizes this community, what is most important to residents of this community, "who" is this community?]

Q5A.   What do you think makes this community unique compared to other parts of Illinois or surrounding areas?

Q6.   What are the most important socio-economic challenges [COMMUNITY] faces? [PROBE: economic hardship, social challenges like racism or xenophobia, access to education or other institutions, specific historical challenges that affect the present day]

Q7.   How would you characterize ethnic or cultural diversity in [COMMUNITY]?

Q8.   Are there commonly spoken languages in [COMMUNITY] other than English; if so, what languages? Are there specific areas within the community where there is a higher density of people with limited English proficiency? Are there areas where businesses and institutions specifically cater to non-English-speaking customers?

Q9.   How would you describe political leanings in [COMMUNITY]? [IF NEEDED: very conservative, very liberal, or mixed]

Q10.   What religious groups are most prevalent in [COMMUNITY]?

Q11.   Are there other types of minority social groups with a larger than usual presence in the community, such as veterans, LGBTQ+ people, undocumented immigrants, or returning citizens (i.e., formerly incarcerated people)? Are there many businesses owned or operated by these groups?

Now let's talk specifically about the business community in [COMMUNITY].

Q12.   What are some of the most prevalent or highly trafficked business areas that come to mind in [COMMUNITY]? [PROBE: neighborhoods or parts of town; a particular highways or business strips; none at all in smaller towns]

Q13.   [FOR MONMOUTH OR RURAL COMMUNITIES: Are there any specific large businesses or institutions in the area that are major employment sources for [COMMUNITY]?

Q14.   Are there basic goods or services that [COMMUNITY] lacks locally?

Q15.   Do people from the community frequently travel to or from other regions/communities in Illinois to receive specific goods or services? For example, do a lot of people do their grocery shopping or other errands in towns or cities outside of [COMMUNITY]; or do they come to this [COMMUNITY]? If so, where do they go or where do they come from? Does this cause challenges or opportunities for local businesses?

Q16. Do community members commonly travel to/from other regions/communities for work? What regions/communities are they traveling to/from for work? Does this cause challenges for local businesses?

Now let's shift focus to community-serving institutions or organizations in [COMMUNITY].

Q17. In general, where do people in [COMMUNITY] go for support? [IF NEEDED: In other words, where do they go to receive social services in times of need, such as financial hardship, childcare support, or food insecurity?]

Q17A. What are some of the most prevalent non-profits or other community-serving organizations that come to mind in [COMMUNITY]? What are the services and targeted populations/demographics for these organizations?

Q17B. How many K-12 schools are in the community? Are there many pre-schools or childcare providers? What about other types of educational or recreational institutions, like libraries or community centers?

Q17C. [FOR MONMOUTH OR RURAL COMMUNITIES: Are there local medical or health resources in the community, such as hospitals or smaller medical centers? [IF NONE/FEW: Where would residents go in a medical emergency?]

Q17D. [FOR MONMOUTH OR RURAL COMMUNITIES: Are there other types of local social support services, such as homeless shelters, women's' shelters, food banks, or soup kitchens?

Challenges for Businesses and Institutions

Q18. What would you say are the three biggest community-specific threats or challenges to small businesses in [COMMUNITY]? In other words, what are some of the challenges they commonly face in their day-to-day operations? What kinds of businesses struggle the most, if any?

Q19. What unique challenges, if any, do not-for-profit institutions like churches, schools, libraries, or community centers face compared to small businesses in your community? Which ones struggle the most, if any?

Q20. What are some unique challenges that small businesses and institutions face associated with being in a [densely populated/rural] area compared to [rural/densely populated] regions? [IF NEEDED: For example, does the community have a higher cost of living, more business competition, more crime?]

Q21. What impact did the COVID-19 pandemic have on the businesses and institutions in your community? Do these challenges persist today?

Investment Needs and Sources of Support

Q22. What are the three most common investment priorities that you observe amongst small businesses and institutions in [COMMUNITY]? [IF NEEDED: If they had the money, what are the investments they would likely make first?] [Examples: promotions, aesthetic improvements (e.g., improved signage or appearance), equipment or facility upgrades, safety/security, hiring new staff or increasing employee compensation] [PROBE FOR DIFFERENCES BETWEEN BUSINESSES AND INSTITUTIONS]

Q22A.   Compared to other priorities, would you say that energy management or lowering energy bills is a high, medium, or low priority?

Q23.   [IF LOW PRIORITY/NOT A PRIORITY] What do you think causes small businesses or institutions to de-prioritize energy management or lowering energy bills?

Q24.   In general, where do small businesses/institutions in [COMMUNITY] often look for support when they are facing financial challenges or issues with their operations [PROBE: financial hardship, inability or difficulty hiring, deciding on investments, managing costs, etc.]? In other words, what B2B businesses (if needed: like contractors, tax preparers, or legal service providers), government organizations, or non-profits do they often rely on for support?

Q25.   In what ways could small businesses or institutions in your communities be better supported in general? What support services do they lack, if any?

Barriers to Energy Management and Participation in AIC Offerings [Ask only AIC Partners]

Q26.   What do you think are the most common barriers small businesses and institutions face in reducing energy costs or making energy-saving investments?

Q26A.   How knowledgeable do you think small businesses and institutions are about ways to manage their energy costs or potential energy-savings investments?

Q26B.   How often do small businesses and institutions have total control over decisions to make significant equipment or structural changes to their property, versus needing to get approval from other parties, like a landlord, funders/donors, or the local government? How often do business owners/institution administrators understand how to discuss this with their landlord, funders/donors, or the local government?

Q27.   Do small businesses and institutions in your community demonstrate awareness of AIC Business offerings?

Q27A.   What are the most common perceptions of AIC energy efficiency offerings among the small businesses and institutions in your community? Are they skeptical about the offerings?

Q27B.   Do you think the businesses and institutions in your community would be interested in participating in Ameren Illinois' energy efficiency offerings? [IF NEEDED: rebates or discounts on lighting, heating and cooling equipment, ventilation; building shell improvements; incentives for custom projects, etc.] What do you think encourages or discourages them to be interested in Ameren's energy efficiency offerings?

Q28.   What benefits, if any, do businesses/institutions perceive toward going green/investing in clean energy in your community? Do attractive benefits exist beyond bill savings/financial incentives?

Q29.   How could some of the barriers we've discussed potentially be resolved?

Engagement Strategies

Thank you again for taking the time to provide this helpful information. Our last topic is about strategies for reaching out to small businesses and institutions in [COMMUNITY].

Q30.   What do you think would are the best ways to engage or market to businesses and institutions in [COMMUNITY]? [PROBE: languages, messaging/word choice, credible messengers, specific types of events or outreach tactics]

Q30A.   What messaging or communication styles resonate with businesses and institutions in [COMMUNITY]? In other words, for any kind of outreach campaign, when you think of popular brands or recent efforts to "get the word out" within your community, what comes to mind as particularly successful?

Q30B.   Generally speaking, what group(s) or organization(s) would you say community members find most trustworthy for information about issues, products, or services within your community? What groups or organizations do you think they find least trustworthy? Would you say businesses or institutions think Ameren is a trustworthy source of information?

Q30C.   Can you think of events in your community where information or materials about energy management could be distributed and would be well-received by businesses and institutions? Have you/your organization planned or attended these events?

Q31.   When you think about brands, advertising campaigns, or educational outreach efforts targeted toward businesses and institutions in general, what comes to mind? Were they successful or unsuccessful? What reasons do you attribute to that success/lack of success?

Q31A.   [ASK IF AIC PARTNER] What Ameren messaging or engagement strategies, if any, have been particularly successful or unsuccessful in [COMMUNITY]? What reasons do you attribute to that success/lack of success? In other words, how do you typically position the Business Programs in order to effectively engage community members?

Q31B.   [IF ORG DOES THEIR OWN CAMPAIGNS OR OUTREACH] What messaging or engagement strategies has your organization implemented that has been particularly successful or unsuccessful in [COMMUNITY]? What reasons do you attribute to that success/lack of success?

Q32.   What outreach strategies do you suggest that Ameren Illinois could use to best engage with businesses and institutions about energy management specifically? How do or would you position or introduce the concept of energy management to a business or institutions that has never heard or rarely thinks about energy management [PROBE: for example, what words do you use, what benefits do you mention]?

Q33.   What other advice would you offer to Ameren Illinois in improving their ability to reach small businesses and institutions and make a positive impression in the [COMMUNITY] community?

Closing

Q34.   Who else in your community do you think might be a good resource for us to speak with about our research? Think of people who are considered leaders in the community and could speak to the needs

of the community or potentially effective marketing and outreach strategies, such as a local government leader, chamber of commerce, community centers, or non-profit organizations.

Q34A.   Would you be willing to put us in contact with that person/those people? Do you have contact information that you could share with my team?

Q35.   [IF MDI PARTNER] In the future, would you or someone else at your organization be willing to speak with another member of my team about your experience as an Ameren Illinois MDI Partner? [IF NEEDED: Our research team is also conducting conversations with MDI Partners to collect feedback on your experience, including understanding roles and responsibilities among partners, identifying key successes and challenges, and determining whether opportunities exist for AIC to provide you with further support.]

Q36.   I think those are all the questions I had for you today. Do you have any additional thoughts you would like to share with us that you think would be helpful for our research?

Q37.   Should we have any additional questions, would it be okay if we reached out to you for follow up?

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