

Local Government Case Study:
San Bernardino County

Background

- Location: San Bernardino County
- Population: 1,709,434
- Size: 19,000 employees
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Summary

San Bernardino County's goal in 2001 was to reduce its energy use by 10 percent. The County faced a major challenge: How could it get the community to conserve energy when temperatures were in the high 90s during the summer and air conditioning was a necessity? The County developed an innovative solution: Convert unused spaces into "cool centers." The cool centers eased the summer for the County's low-income, disabled and senior-citizen populations (approximately 18 percent of the population in San Bernardino County is below the poverty line and 8.6 percent is over 65 years old). The cool centers, coupled with a public education campaign and energy efficiency upgrades of county facility lighting and water systems, helped San Bernardino reach its 10 percent goal.

Referenced in Local Government Guides:

- #1, "Reduce Energy Use in Local Government Facilities Through Conservation Measures"
- #3, "Promote Energy Conservation and Efficiency Through a Public Outreach Campaign"
- #4, "Promote Energy Conservation and Efficiency Through Public Services, Incentives and Technical Assistance"
- #5, "Target Low-Income and Senior Populations for Energy Conservation"

Plan

County staff surveyed 63 County facilities' electricity usage rates to determine electricity usage and the best means of conservation. An inventory of lighting fixtures was compiled to determine the number of inefficient lighting fixtures that needed to be replaced.

An energy crisis team consisting of representatives from various County departments, including facilities management, office of emergency services and architecture and engineering, was established to create and implement an energy conservation/efficiency program.

San Bernardino County also targeted the low-income, disabled and senior populations. Approximately 18 percent of the population in San Bernardino County was below the poverty line and 8.6 percent of the population is over 65 years of age. Cool Centers were proposed by the task force and were intended to provide dual relief: an escape from the summer heat for seniors, the disabled and low-income families, and lower home energy bills.

The county set its goal at reducing 10 percent of its energy usage; it also intended to help residents cut their home energy bills. With the multifaceted energy conservation programs in place, the county projected savings of \$2.3 million.

Programs: Conservation

✓ **Lighting:** City Hall removed half of its facility's light bulbs.

Programs: Efficiency

✓ **Lighting**

- Incandescent lights were replaced with fluorescent lights in county facilities.
- Traffic signals throughout the county were retrofitted with LED signals.

✓ **Microturbines:** The county installed three 60 kW Capstone microturbines at the Central Juvenile Hall in San Bernardino. The microturbines can supply up to 180 kW of power.

Programs: Employee Outreach

County employees were challenged to help meet the 10 percent conservation goal.

- ✓ **Newsletter:** Printed conservation tips in the employee newsletter.
- ✓ **Website:** Posted conservation tips.
- ✓ **Dress policy:** Set a casual dress policy to ease the heat, as employees were asked to turn their air conditioners up to 78 F.
- ✓ **Recognition:** Awards picnic for employees, which was tentatively scheduled for March 2002. An “Energy Miser” of the Quarter Award was given to the employee with the best energy conservation tips and suggestions each quarter. The award was based on employee nominations.

Programs: Public Outreach

- ✓ **Small business audits:** Staff attended a two-day training by SEC, where they learned how to conduct audits of small businesses throughout the county. Small businesses were alerted to the free audits through direct mailers and public service announcements. Four one-day seminars were conducted for small businesses.

Programs: Services

- ✓ **Community centers:** After three months of planning, 12 “cool centers” opened throughout the County of San Bernardino for the summer of 2001. The centers opened during peak use hours, between 11 a.m. and 7 p.m. Locations included Barstow, San Bernardino, Rubidoux, Highgrove and Beaumont, among others. Senior centers, community/recreation centers and malls were among the facilities transformed into cool centers. Provisions included the comfort of air conditioning, beverages, a free meal, a community setting with games for seniors and homework centers for youth.

Educational information about programs aimed at conserving energy and reducing utility bills was also made available. Community-based organizations (CBOs) provided visitors with extensive information on how to save energy and reduce utility bills. They distributed Flex Your Power brochures in several languages, including Braille; enlisted Ace Hardware to conduct free demonstrations of energy-efficient equipment and appliances; distributed 20/20 program applications for residents; coordinated free weatherization services; and provided energy-efficient products such as evaporative coolers and face plate insur-gents.

Programs: Incentives

- ✓ **Energy Micro Loan Program:** Offered small businesses loans to implement energy-saving retrofits. Loans ranged from \$5,000 to \$25,000.

Budget and Finance

San Bernardino County received a grant from the CEC totaling \$321,250 and low-interest loans from the California Infrastructure Economic Development Bank totalling \$5 million for water system upgrades in the High Desert. The Public Works Department provided funding for the LED traffic signals through the transportation special revenue fund budget. The South Coast Air Quality Management District provided a grant for the microturbines. The State Public Utilities Commission funded the Cool Centers with a \$1 million grant.

Results

The 12 cool centers averaged 125 visitors per day.

Eighty of the county’s facilities tracked their energy savings and the results were posted on the intranet website for employees to see.

More than 500 small businesses were audited and 30 to 40 percent of the businesses implemented the recommended changes.