



The Man Who Powers Energy Efficiency Work in Washington State

by [Trisha Paul](#) December 16, 2011
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One of my favorite presentations at our 2011 Green Day Forum was from John Davies, Director of the Opportunity Council's Building Performance Center in Bellingham, Washington. His presentation, "The Weatherization Industry Grows Up," left me fascinated with the work that our northern colleague is engaged in.

Since 1998, the Building Performance Center has been providing weatherization and home energy retrofit training to auditors, inspectors, technicians and home performance contractors. When the economic downturn left many residential builders out of work, the BPC joined with state and local partners to strategize solutions to get contractors back to work doing energy efficiency retrofits. The Community Energy Challenge (CEC) was conceived and created as a complete resource for homeowners interested in energy efficiency improvements. Along with their partners, the BPC identified 4 key elements for success:

- **Accurate and trustworthy information**
- **Qualified, well-trained professional home performance contractors**
- **Competitive pricing with all rebates and incentives and financing options in one place**
- **Strong quality assurance**

In 2009, the Opportunity Council was awarded \$1.5 million in federal stimulus funds to manage and deliver the pilot program as designed. The CEC covers all of Whatcom County, including the city of Bellingham. Weatherization and energy saving retrofit work can make a positive difference on the energy use of a typical home, and homeowner awareness of the economic and energy-saving benefits of this work continues to grow. Homeowners want to know what improvements provide the biggest energy-saving bang for the buck. However, all homes are different, so identifying the most cost-effective energy saving measures can be a real challenge. The Energy Performance Score is a software tool and measurement platform for accurately defining a home's performance, much like the miles-per-gallon of a car. Energy service providers using this tool have already begun experiencing a competitive advantage in transforming the market for a more sustainable and energy efficient community.

The Community Energy Challenge staff and contractors have assessed over 750 homes and are seeing 60% of program participants follow through with completion of at least one major energy conservation measure. This success is due in part to the incentives provided by the Recovery Act stimulus dollars. These incentives, matched the utility rebates, and are due to expire toward the end of 2012. Davies is working with program staff and contractors to develop a business model that can survive and prosper once these incentives go away.