

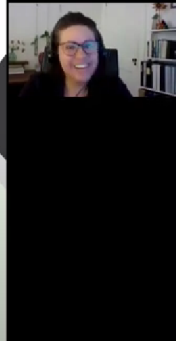
THE ENERGY RIGHTS PROJECT

Quarterly Research Newsletter

Building Resilient Communities

- Increase Accessibility of Resources
- Coordinate Community Response
- Eliminate Stigma
- Promote Health and Wellbeing
- Advance Prevention Initiatives

Resilience isn't about pushing through and past your limits. It's about building capacity and resource internally so that you have the energy to skillfully meet what life is presenting you.
maryam hasnaa



The 2021 ECA Conference

By Andrew Rosenthal

The Energy Coordinating Agency's 2021 Virtual Conference occurred on Friday, October 1st from 8:00 AM to 1:00 PM EST. ECA reached out to The Energy Rights Project to help with their 2021 annual conference and our team was delighted to be on the conference committee for a second year in a row. The 2021 theme was "Recovering Communities After Crisis." Andrew Rosenthal served in the role of technical director, which involved pre-recording all speaker presentations and playing them during the live Zoom conference. The entire conference has been archived on Youtube: <https://youtu.be/gv7IgJQIajc>

This year's keynote speaker was Elizabeth Marx, Executive Director at Pennsylvania Utility Law Project (PULP). PULP is a statewide specialty legal services program within the Pennsylvania Legal Aid Network. PULP focuses on legal representation, education, policy advocacy, supportive services, and consultation.

IN THIS ISSUE

NEC NETWORKS: TALES FROM ENERGY EXPERTS
PAGES 3-4

NEC SUMMER WORKSHOPS: KEY TAKEAWAYS
PAGES 5-6

LEARNING ABOUT ENERGY CONSERVATION
PAGES 6-7

MAINTENANCE, RETROFITTING, & WEATHERIZATION
PAGES 7-9

TALKING TO PHILADELPHIANS ABOUT ENERGY RIGHTS
PAGES 9-10

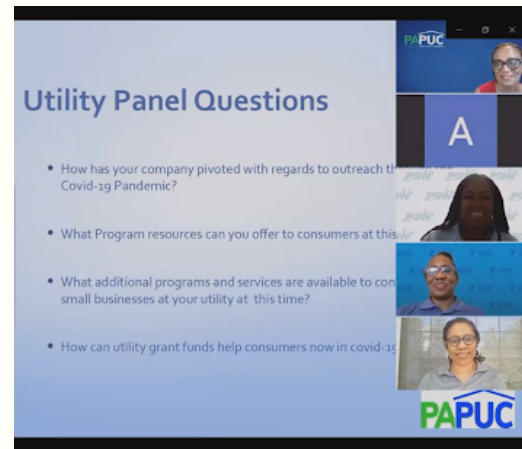
WHAT'S NEXT? UPDATE FROM THE PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR
PAGE 12

ABOUT THE ENERGY RIGHTS PROJECT
PAGE 13

Ms. Marx discussed how the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated utility unaffordability, with low-income households paying as much as 30% of their income on home energy costs. She argued that much of this is due to outdated housing stock that has been a pressing issue in Philadelphia for decades. This is not only a comfortability issue but also a public health issue as homes that are not airtight and energy efficient allow pollutants to enter more easily. Through retrofitting and weatherization services, the ECA can make a big difference both in home comfort and public health. According to a Duke University working paper the utility moratoria reduced infection rates by 4.4% and mortality rates by 7.4% nationwide. Marx ended her presentation by stating that building resilient communities involves increasing accessibility to resources, coordinating community responses, eliminating stigma, promoting health and wellbeing, and advancing prevention initiatives.

Following Ms. Marx's keynote, the first panel of the day was titled "Utilities: Life after the Moratorium" which was facilitated by Shari Williams of the Pennsylvania Utility Commission. The speakers were Laura Copeland of PWD, Nyisha Chapman of PGW, and Patricia King of PECO. The discussion included information on utility company pandemic responses, community outreach in order to get customers in need of assistance on programs, expanded eligibility for certain programs, and an overview of assistance programs currently being offered.

The next panel was "Housing: First time Home Buyers and Foreclosures" facilitated by Ejhadji Ndiaye of the Division of Housing and Community Development (DHCD). Rashida Johnson of DHCD, Stasia Monteiro of H.A.C.E and Michael Rapp of United Communities were the speakers for this panel. Neighborhood Advisory Committees (NAC), which connect with Philadelphia residents with housing information, were a focal point of this panel.



The final panel was titled "Community Resilience" and was facilitated by Catherine Santos of ECA. The first speaker was Wanda Mitchell of Philadelphia Corporation for the Aging (PCA) and she spoke on the services the PCA offers including but not limited to adult daily living services, assistive technology, home-delivered meals, Telecare, home health services, non-medical transportation, and specialized medical equipment. Walt Yakabosky, representing the ECA's Knight Training Center, provided an overview of the training and certification programs offered and called for greater diversity in trainees. Maurice Sampson spoke next, discussing new COVID safety programs, including their soil sampling program and the outdoor environmental education facilities they plan to open soon. Lastly, Steve Luxton spoke on weatherization and how the ECA is the sole weatherization provider in the city of Philadelphia. The heater hotline was stressed during his presentation as 45% of a typical energy bill is due to heating and cooling.



NEC Networks: A tale from energy counselors

By Briana Leone

Philadelphia's Neighborhood Energy Centers (NECs) are a critical checkpoint for local energy assistance. If you're experiencing difficulties paying your utilities, NECs have counselors that help you figure out which programs you are eligible for to help pay your utilities and even retrofit your homes, if and when needed. NEC counselors are energy experts who teach workshops that can help community members conserve energy and can go over your energy bills one-on-one during their office hours. Counselors also help clients budget their monthly incomes to better fit their lifestyles.

A few months ago Dr. Kenner interviewed 14 NEC staff members, including four executive directors, to learn more about what happens in the NEC office. Each interview averaged between 1.5 and 2 hours, and covered topics such as how energy counselors help people overcome barriers to assistance, how NECs conduct outreach, as well as the organizational structure and operation of the NEC.

The interviews also covered the impacts of the pandemic and the utility shutoff moratorium which affected both operations and assistance requests. Some energy assistance funding comes from the federal level. These programs are LIHEAP (the Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program) and WAP (Weatherization Assistance Program). Funds for these two programs are distributed to all fifty states each year and the states determine how the funds will be used.

In Philadelphia, households may also receive energy assistance from UESF (the Utility Emergency Service Fund) or the local utility companies. Utility companies also provide their own assistance in addition to the federal one. PGW has the Customer Responsibility Program (CRP), PECO has the Customer Assistance Program (CAP) and the Philadelphia Water Department has the Tiered Assistance Program (TAP).

In the interviews, NEC staff members talked about how customers can apply to each assistance program. In almost all the interviews NEC staff members noted that the income guidelines were the greatest obstacle faced by those seeking assistance.



In one NEC counselor's words:

"I would like those income guidelines to reflect, realistically, what people's needs are. The cost of living is disproportionate in so many ways. And honestly, when I look at people's incomes, especially my seniors, I'm like, 'I know you're not ... There's no way you're making it.' And I think those are the hardest budget counselings for me to do"

Although the pandemic did not immediately increase the demand for assistance, due to the utility shutoff moratorium, NEC counselors were seeing clients with bill amounts higher than they had seen before in their years of work. In some cases, this was because people stopped coming into the office due to COVID-19 risks. Of course, the pandemic also revolutionized the way in which NECs dispense their services. Although in some ways switching to appointment based and virtual services placed additional burdens on some NEC counselors and individuals seeking assistance, it simultaneously created a new avenue for individuals to obtain assistance.

As a result of the pandemic, outreach efforts had to be doubled in order to make up for the diminished foot traffic into the NEC offices. Less foot traffic can also be attributed to utility companies contacting customers directly including by independently sending out LIHEAP applications. In some cases, the utility companies sent customers applications for the wrong funding year, which delayed customer assistance and was only remedied after seeking help from the NECs. When people receive applications in the mail, rather than speaking to a counselor, customers may not learn about other programs they may qualify for.

Why is it important to keep NECs functioning? NECs are nested neighborhood organizations that are often part of other larger offices that provide aid for housing, childcare, food pantries and other types of services. Some NECs are part of organizations that hosted vaccination clinics and heavily campaigned to provide accurate information about public health. In other words, NECs are critical hubs for neighborhoods. They are brick and mortar communities where people can access information, connect with experts, meet neighbors, and attend workshops that foster civic engagement and home health.



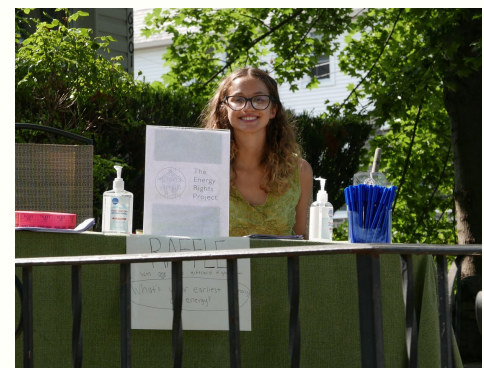
NEC summer workshops: Key takeaways

By Morgan Sarao

Throughout the summer of 2021, the Energy Rights Project in partnership with the Energy Coordinating Agency hosted 15 comprehensive energy conservation workshops in communities across the tri-state region. These workshops focused on electricity and water conservation techniques, giving folks tools to help lower the cost of their electric and water bills amid the summer heat in Philly. Each household that attended a workshop received a conservation kit with energy efficient technologies that will help to make their home more comfortable and affordable, along with packets containing lists of local resources for energy assistance. As our summer workshop series wraps up, we reflect on the incredible people that we connected with at each workshop, the communities that welcomed us into their space, and our positioning as researchers studying and advocating for the right to energy.

Although the barriers to accessing and maintaining affordable energy in Philadelphia are manifold, we believe that energy workshops help to shift power from utility companies into the hands of energy consumers. These workshops created spaces for residents to think more deeply about their relationship to their home energy systems. To quote energy educator BJ McDuffie, “It’s not what you know that’s hurting you, it’s what you don’t know”. Knowledge is power, and understanding the factors that contribute to the price one pays for energy each month not only allows residents to modify wasteful energy behaviors, but can help them advocate for themselves and their household’s energy needs and rights.

Knowledge sharing at our workshops was a two-way street: attendees shared stories of their energy burdens as well as strategies for reducing such burdens, and gained energy assistance resources and conservation knowledge that they can share.



As researchers, we learned about the individualized yet widespread experiences of energy vulnerability, but most importantly we learned that energy consumers in Philadelphia are resilient and they are visionaries. When energy is not affordable or easily accessible, Philadelphians cope by lending support to their neighbors in need and develop creative strategies to conserve energy in their homes. In follow-up interviews with workshop attendees, attendees articulated visions for energy futures, where energy is clean and affordable, and where all energy consumers' needs are adequately met. Our team seeks to uplift these visions through our publications as we wrap up our research project, and are excited to continue these conversations with residents and stakeholders across Philadelphia in the coming months.

Learning about energy conservation

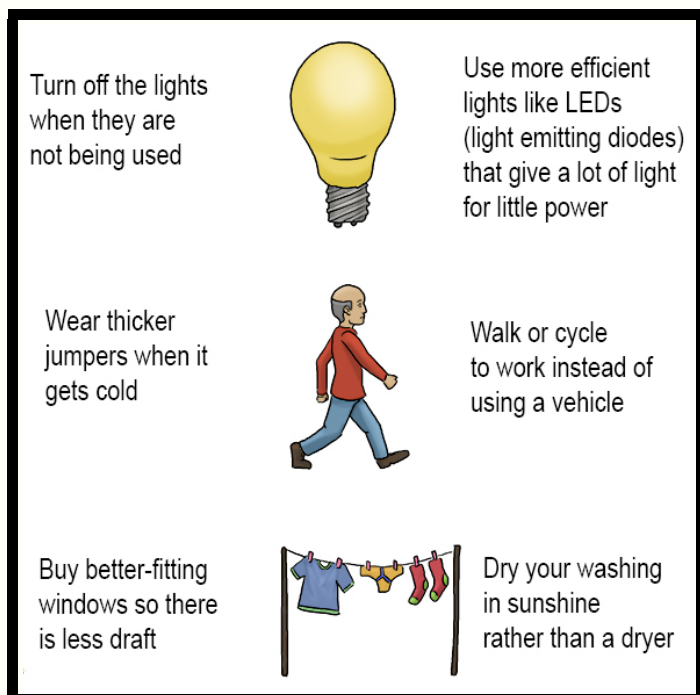
By Briana Leone

Throughout TERP's research on energy assistance, energy conservation has been an important topic. But what is energy conservation, you might ask. Well, as defined in the academic world, energy conservation is related to all of the behaviors that can help to reduce energy consumption (Asensio & Delmas, 2015; Jachimowicz et al., 2018). Energy conservation is generally easier to practice than energy efficiency because it calls for little financial investment if any on the part of everyday people like you and me. Energy conservation is also among the first suggested strategies to lower one's utility bills and, as such, plays a very large role in the energy assistance sector.



As we interviewed members from the Philadelphia community, we continued to learn about what energy conservation looked like in practice, beyond the academic literature. We asked people who attended NEC energy workshops whether they practiced conservation or if they knew of any conservation strategies that could help reduce utility bill charges.

We found that energy conservation is very much tied to literacy, i.e. the competence and knowledge one has of something, and specifically energy literacy. Out of 162 people who were asked whether they practiced conservation before the COVID-19 pandemic occurred, between 8% and 35% of respondents engaged in at least one energy conservation behavior (shutting off lights, using as much sunlight as possible, lowering the weather heater, unplugging unused devices, consulting educational material, etc.).



You can read on some of these strategies directly from the people we've interviewed:

"I tell my daughter to use, not run, water. I don't let her wash the dishes because she gonna have the water running, so me and my wife wash the dishes. I make sure the lights and stuff are off and send my daughter upstairs and ask her if she cut the light out. Then making sure light is in place and the lights should be on, and before going to sleep I make all the nobs is off and I make sure the refrigerator doors are shut...that's the habit I got."

(Black Woman, 55-64, March 2021)

What we have gathered throughout these interviews is that, besides being very much tied to behaviors, energy conservation is very individualistic. Each and every one of us does the best we can to try to save energy.

When possible, energy conservation should be paired with energy efficiency, which is how well our homes and the appliances in our homes use energy. Older appliances and older windows, for example, all drive up our energy consumption and energy conservation practices can only offset appliances and our building structure to a point. That being said, we learned from the Philadelphians who participated in our project that every little bit counts when you're trying to save energy!

Maintenance, retrofitting, and weatherization

By Andrew Rosenthal

Weatherization is one of the best ways that energy customers can reduce their utility bills and make their home environments more comfortable during summer and winter temperature extremes. According to Pennsylvania's Department of Community and Economic Development, "Pennsylvania's Weatherization Assistance Program increases energy efficiency in homes by reducing energy costs and increasing comfort while safeguarding health and safety."

Do homeowners and renters know what weatherization is, and how to get their buildings weatherized? Our interview project set out to assess what people know about weatherization, among other things. (Please see our Spring and Summer Newsletters for more information on what data we have collected.)

Our first analysis involved two interview groups. The spring group was made up of eighty-six respondents recruited through Drexel University using the snowball method. The winter group was made up of eighty-three respondents recruited through NEC workshops.

In the interviews, we asked respondents how they maintained their homes, if their homes were weatherized, and if they were familiar with weatherization assistance programs. General understanding of weatherization varied drastically between the two groups. The spring group was largely unaware of the practice of weatherization, 37 out of 81 respondents (45.8%) were unsure of what was meant by the term “weatherization”. By comparison, only eight out of 81 winter respondents (9.9%) were unsure what was meant by the term “weatherization”.

Has your home been weatherized through WAP?	Spring	Winter	Cumulative
My home is not weatherized	29/81 (35.8%)	37/81 (45.7%)	66/162 (40.7%)
I do not know what WAP is	74/81 (92.6%)	26/83 (31.3%)	40/164 (60.1%)
I do not know what weatherization is	37/81 (45.8%)	8/81 (9.9%)	38/162 (23.5%)
Weatherized my own home	15/81 (18.5%)	15/81 (18.5%)	30/162 (18.5%)
Weatherized through WAP	0/31 (0%)	15/81 (18.5%)	15/163 (9.3%)

The Weatherization Assistance Program (WAP) was largely unknown to the spring group; only seven respondents (7.4%) reported having heard of the program. The program, which helps eligible residents with weatherization services, was familiar to 56 out of 83 winter respondents (67.5%). Fifteen respondents (18.5%) in the winter group had weatherized their own home, the exact same amount as the spring group interestingly enough.

Forty-four winter respondents (55.7%) reported that their windows were drafty and twenty-four (30.4%) reported their home is poorly insulated, yet only fifteen respondents (18.5%) had received assistance through WAP. With people spending more time at home during the pandemic, many might have finally found the time to fix that leaky faucet, drafty window, or other previously deferred repairs, yet our research shows that the pandemic also brought with it barriers towards making those much needed repairs. Thirty-six out of 81 winter respondents (37%) had delayed maintenance on their home due to COVID-19, nearly double that of the spring group (sixteen out of eighty four respondents or 19.4%).

Below is a breakdown of reasons respondents gave for delaying maintenance.

Have you delayed maintenance due to COVID-19?	Spring	Winter	Cumulative
No maintenance was scheduled.	40/84 (48.7%)	33/81 (40.7%)	73/165 (44.3%)
Maintenance went on as planned	18/84 (21.4%)	15/81 (18.5%)	33/165 (20%)
Yes, due to stay at home order	9/84 (10.1%)	12/81 (14.8%)	21/165 (12.7%)
Yes, due to financial restraints	3/84 (3.4%)	16/81 (19.8%)	19/165 (11.5%)
Yes, due to fears of COVID-19	8/84 (9%)	16/81 (19.8%)	24/165 (14.6%)
I don't know	7/84 (7.9%)	4/81 (4.9%)	11/165 (6.7%)
Yes, unspecified	1/84 (1.2%)	(1.2%)	1/165 (1.2%)

While the repairs that were delayed ranged from repainting walls to roof repair, the top five most common repairs that were being delayed were all ones that would contribute significantly to energy insecurity. Eight respondents (17.4%) reported being unable to repair an appliance. Seven respondents (15.2%) out of the forty-six delayed getting a leak repaired. Six respondents (13.4%) delayed getting their roof repaired. Lastly, four respondents (9.1%) reported being unable to replace a window, another four respondents (9.1%) delayed replacing a door, and another four respondents (9.1%) delayed repairing their heater.

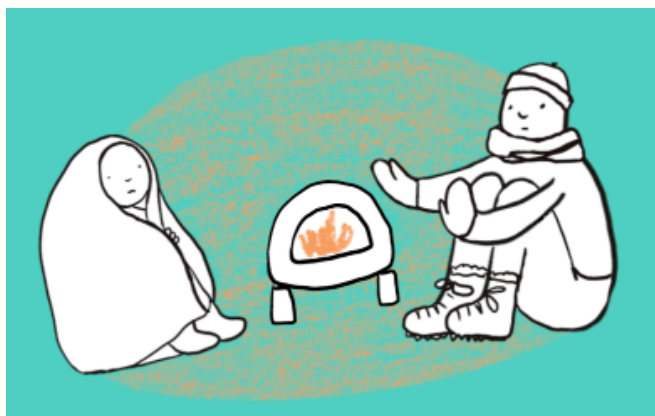
COVID-19 has put home energy systems already in need of weatherization and maintenance work under further stress, with the solutions being placed further out of reach -- namely by throwing up additional hurdles to energy assistance access. As COVID-19 infection rates continue to drop, and vaccination rates continue to rise, we hope that more people will feel confident attending informational workshops and reaching out to Neighborhood Energy Centers to learn if they qualify for weatherization assistance.

Talking to Philadelphians about energy rights

By Morgan Sarao

The United States has been living under the atmosphere of uncertainty created by the COVID-19 pandemic for over 18 months, and pandemic induced modes of living and being will likely persist for the foreseeable future, if not indefinitely. The pandemic has disrupted all sectors of society, and has called into question the stability and resilience of the institutions, systems, and processes that impact our daily life.

As researchers studying household energy vulnerability, the pandemic shifted the scope of our work, and we questioned how stay-at-home orders would affect energy use and access for households experiencing financial hardships, and what policies and initiatives would be developed or adapted to address new energy needs. We also questioned how engagement with energy systems would shift among energy users, especially those in vulnerable positions, and what these changes would mean for energy cultures in both Philadelphia and the nation at large.



The implementation of state-wide moratoria on utility shut-offs during the pandemic seemed to indicate acknowledgement from government and utility actors that consistent access to energy was a necessity.

However, the moratoria were temporary policies that have now been lifted in most states, including Pennsylvania, though the pandemic persists. The dependence on household energy to stay healthy and connected to society has not gone away because stay-at-home orders have been lifted, and access to consistent and affordable household energy has been a necessity since long before the pandemic began.

Our relationship to household energy, as the pandemic has shown, does not appear to be a matter of luxury, but of fundamental rights, though many may not view it this way because of the entrenched placement of energy access in capitalist marketplaces.

From May of 2020 to September of 2021, the Energy Rights Project has engaged with over 300 energy users through semi-structured interviews to learn about the impacts of the pandemic on all aspects of their home energy systems, including bill payment, energy usage, energy literacy, conservation & efficiency measures, home maintenance, and energy assistance.

We also sought to inquire about existing and shifting energy cultures from the perspectives of energy users. At the end of each interview, we asked participants "Do you have a right to energy?", and if so, "What do you think your energy rights are?", and if not, "Do you think there are energy services that are needed to succeed in society?"

Our team has begun analyzing the responses to these three questions, and so far our findings relate to both political philosophy and different components of energy culture, looking at how respondents talked about the relationship between their rights, energy services, and infrastructure.

From this work we have found that our respondent pool has engaged with the idea of the "right to energy" in three major ways:

- "Empty Rights", where the idea of the right to energy is an empty offer. For some respondents, claiming a right to energy was meaningless, as they believed that rights either do not truly exist in our country, or are not protected so they hold no political weight.



- "Scaled Rights", where respondents believed people have different energy needs based on a range of physical, social, and ecological factors.
- "Robust Collective Capabilities", which is a broad category where respondents articulated visions of society different from today's status quo — alternative energy markets and infrastructures, subsidized by the state. Some people also thought about their energy rights beyond the individual home and talked about access to public transportation and energy education.

It's important to note that our team is in the initial stages of analyzing this data, and that each of the themes listed above contain multiple nuanced sub-themes. As we continue conceptualizing what it means for Philadelphians to have, or not to have, the right to energy, we invite you to reflect on where you stand in relation to these questions.

Image Citations

The below image citations correspond to the page number and image number. All pie charts, graphs, and tables were created by research team members using data from our 2020 survey.

Page 3: "Untitled." Congreso receives \$200,000 as part of Family Recovery Funds grants. *Al Día News*. Accessed November 15, 2021. <https://aldianews.com/articles/leaders/non-profits/congreso-receives-200000-part-family-recovery-funds-grants/65337>

Page 4: "Untitled." ECA Facebook. Accessed November 15, 2021. <https://www.facebook.com/ecasavesenergy/photos/a.10150665128145750/10155836505805750/?type=1&theater>

Page 5.1: "Untitled." Summer Cooling Workshops. Taeya Boi-Doku.

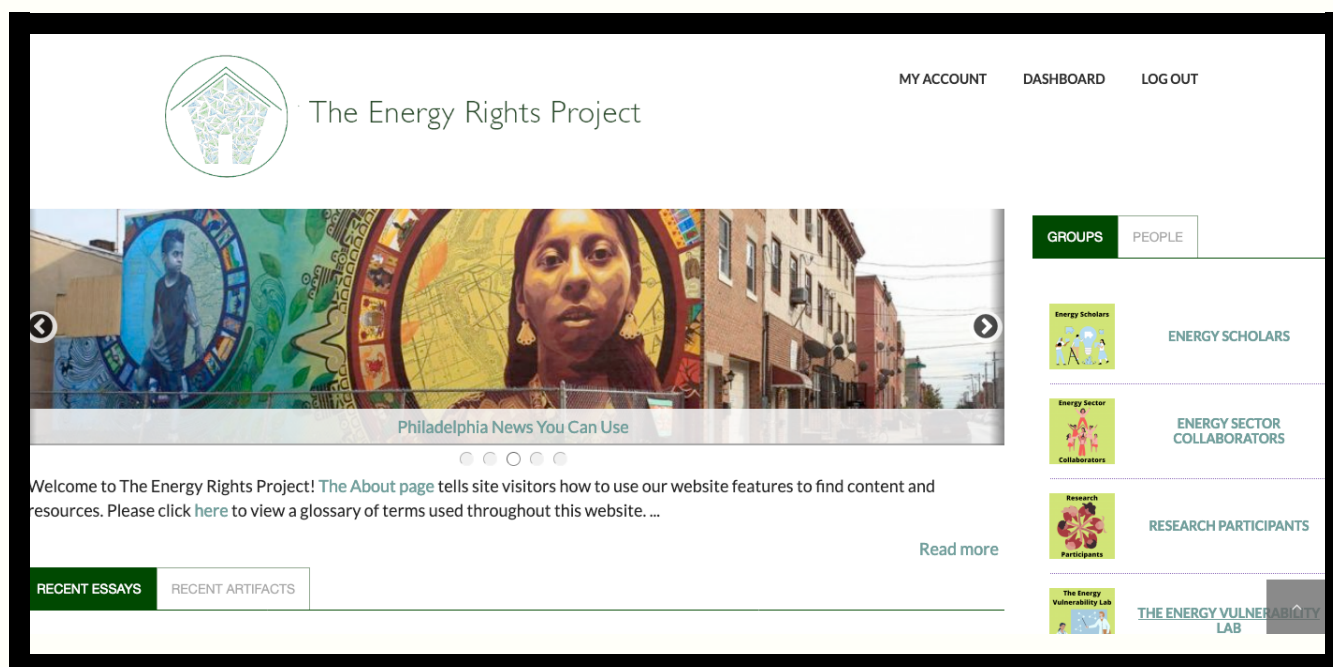
Page 5.2: "Untitled." Summer Cooling Workshops. Taeya Boi-Doku.

Page 6: "Untitled." Understanding Energy Conservation and Its Many Benefits. *Just Energy*. Accessed November 15, 2021. <https://justenergy.com/blog/understanding-energy-conservation-and-its-many-benefits/>

Page 7: "Untitled." Energy Conservation – Reducing energy consumption and becoming more efficient in using existing energy sources. *Mammoth Memory*. Accessed November 15, 2021. <https://mammothmemory.net/geography/geography-vocabulary/energy/energy-conservation.html>

Page 10: "Untitled." Topic 4: Who are the invisible energy poor. *Engager Energy Rights Forum*. Accessed November 22, 2021. <https://engager-energy-rights.eu/2021/in/schedule/2021-03-18/>

Page 11: "Untitled." Topic 3: Solution to energy poverty? Engager Energy Rights Forum. Accessed November 22, 2021. <https://engager-energy-rights.eu/2021/in/schedule/2021-03-18/>



What's next? A take from the Principal Investigator.

By Alison Kenner

Like all things, every project has its seasons: the planning phase, the introductions and learning curves at the outset, the busyness of main events with lots of energy, and the wind down period when loose ends are tied up and you reflect on the accomplishments. So too with the Energy Rights Project. Moving into the fall months, our team concluded fieldwork with the Energy Coordinating Agency and have since focused on organizing all the data gathered over the last twenty months, since our work began in September 2019. With just four months of funding left, it feels like we have much to do before we close the doors on the Energy Rights Project. I have been reflecting on how a grant funded research project, with a definitive end date, can continue to be useful to organizations after the staff have moved on and all resources have been spent. In the Winter 2022 newsletter, which will be published at the end of February, our team will announce how the project will continue to live on. Perhaps this will be through social media posts that share data from our survey and interview. We will certainly maintain the website for years to come and in the next four months we will be working to make our data accessible and useful on that platform. As we undertake this work, we would love to hear from you in the next month or two, if you have a vision for how we can curate the web archive, if you have information requests, or ideas for future work. Please email us at theenergyrightsproject@gmail.com



The Energy Rights Project

The Energy Rights Project is a social science study that investigates 1) how people understand energy systems, 2) how people access and use energy in their homes, 3) how organizations shape understanding of energy systems and everyday access to energy, and 4) how policy shapes relationships between energy users, energy providers, and energy assistance organizations.

The Energy Rights Project has three main objectives:

1. To collect data and provide analysis that is useful for energy service organizations (ESOs) and policymakers.
2. To provide an archive of material that can lend insight into household energy use, the struggle to secure access, and what can be done to address common problems related to energy affordability and security.
3. To help educate people about energy - through our research activities and also by working with other organizations.

To learn more about the project visit our website at <https://energyrights.info>.

Contributors



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