

# Providing Energy Assistance Information, Training in A Pandemic

**Kentucky Housing Corporation**  
Special Achievement

**HFA Staff Contact**

Molly Tate

[mtate@kyhousing.org](mailto:mtate@kyhousing.org)

[Click here](#) for the submission's landing page, including a video and additional resource links.

## **Providing Energy Assistance Information, Training in A Pandemic**

### **Overview**

Kentucky Housing Corporation (KHC) invests in quality housing solutions to strengthen families and communities across the state. We help families purchase homes so they can have more stability and live more financially secure. We also help families maintain their homes, create safer environments, and preserve their investment by educating them about energy efficient improvements that reduce home energy use, thus making the home more affordable. As the economy changes and costs of goods, services, and other necessities increase, it is essential for many families to reduce other costs and making home energy improvements is one solution with longer-term impacts.

Energy efficiency was especially important in 2020, when many families lost income and could not afford their utility payments. KHC shifted its focus last year to provide online classes to train inspectors, crew leaders, analysts, technicians and auditors how to improve energy efficiency in homes and buildings they visit and how to detect deficiencies.

### **Background**

KHC is home to the Residential Energy Efficiency (REE) Training Initiatives Center, which offers a multifaceted approach to energy efficiency education, including improving the health, comfort, safety and energy efficiency of Kentucky homes. In addition to educating energy consumers, offering certification trainings for professionals helps strengthen the state's economy and helps developers and families get quality, certified work for home energy improvements.

KHC's [REE Training Center](#) offers an array of [training courses](#) for professionals in the building and energy efficiency industries ranging from pre-work energy auditing to post work quality control inspection. The 7,200 square foot training facility is equipped with high-tech classrooms and state-of-the-art training labs to provide students with a high-quality learning environment. SMART technology allows students to participate in the instructional process in the classroom while fully functioning training labs provide students with hands-on application of the techniques learned.

In addition to training and certification for professionals, REE offers education opportunities for public school educators, and homeowners seeking to understand how a home functions as a comprehensive system and to lower their energy consumption.

Through public education, workforce growth, and energy efficiency financing, KHC is committed to supporting and expanding the energy-efficiency industry.

REE also offers an additional revenue stream for KHC through its classes. As the state housing finance agency, KHC is primarily focused on affordable housing – providing low-interest mortgages and down payment assistance, working with developers to construct more multifamily units, ensuring the compliance of federally-funded units and providing housing to those in need. When REE was created, KHC invested significant resources – the purchase of the REE Center, paying for a website, hiring staff – so that the REE Center could essentially be a self-sustaining agency.

Like most businesses during the pandemic, REE has improvised and adapted to ensure it can meet the needs of its customers while keeping revenue flowing in. REE offers virtual, hybrid and in-person classes and follows the proper COVID protocols to ensure that its students are safe while on site.

### **Response to a Need**

KHC's Design and Construction Review Department (DCR) identified a problem multifamily developers were having in understanding and meeting the ventilation requirements for multifamily construction. REE instructors worked with DCR to provide consulting and mentoring to developers to correct ventilation deficiencies in current construction projects to achieve final construction approval. REE also provided in-house training to DCR inspectors to equip them with the knowledge and skills necessary to provide guidance to multifamily developers on future projects.

The REE training center partners with Solar Kentucky to provide free home energy efficiency education workshops to the public through a series of community events throughout Kentucky. Solar Kentucky is a collaborative effort between Clean Power Planet, Kentucky Habitat for Humanity and KHC. In conjunction with Solar Kentucky's efforts to bring awareness about alternative energy sources and to incorporate solar arrays on Habitat for Humanity builds, REE has coordinated free educational workshops at community events including topics such as Basic Home Energy Efficiency, Solar 101, and Energy Efficiency and Solar Incentives.

REE hosted the [Kentucky Chapter of the National Energy Education Development \(NEED\) Project](#) tour to provide energy education to K-12 teachers. REE instructors discussed basic building science and presented an overview of the Kentucky Home Performance (KHP) and the Weatherization Assistance Program (WAP). Providing training to K-12 educators allows them to take that knowledge back to their schools to start early education of the next generation of homeowners and energy consumers.

REE partnered with the Kentucky Department of Housing Buildings and Construction (HBC) to develop a training course to meet a specific need in the Kentucky Heating Ventilation and Air Conditioning (HVAC) industry in response to recent regulatory changes. REE worked with HBC to become an approved continuing education unit (CEU) provider for the Kentucky HVAC industry.

REE identified a shortage of certified Quality Control Inspectors (QCI) serving the U.S. Department of Energy-funded (DOE) Weatherization Assistance Program (WAP) in Kentucky and designed a program to recruit, train and certify QCI inspectors to serve the program while also fostering entrepreneurial opportunities in Kentucky's energy efficiency industry.

### **National Impact**

As only one of 14 similarly accredited centers in the country, REE has a national impact, training students from neighboring states, helping them earn energy efficiency industry certifications and learn techniques they need to make homes and multifamily developments safer and more energy efficient. REE Center Manager Deanna McCord sits on national committees and workgroups, where she helps shape the future of weatherization and energy efficiency and contributes to the national conversation about workforce development. Recently, she was invited to present at the National Association for State Community Services Programs (NASCS) annual conference on the grant-funded job training program

designed to increase the energy efficiency workforce in Kentucky. She also serves on the steering committee for the Building Science Conference and Expo where the REE staff are frequent presenters.

Meanwhile, the late Charlie Smith, a 10-year REE employee, contributed to educational articles about the House of Pressure training tool, a miniature home that teaches about airflow and how ventilation is key in ensuring weatherization techniques in homes work properly. The REE Center uses the miniature home to teach concepts to their students and employs them in presentations at industry conferences.

### **Innovative**

REE seeks out every opportunity to educate about energy efficiency and its financial impacts. From WAP employees, multifamily developers, and the general public to internal KHC staff, REE has taken energy efficiency education beyond traditional boundaries to effect change at every level. KHC took advantage of the small training program it inherited with the WAP in 2009 and grew it into a comprehensive, multi-faceted approach to energy efficiency education. The REE training center was originally housed in a small garage and has since grown to a 7,200 square foot facility.

KHC spent two years working toward obtaining national accreditation from the Interstate Renewable Energy Council (IREC) for the full suite of Home Energy Professional (HEP) training curricula, which includes Energy Auditor, Retrofit Installer Technician, Crew Leader, and Quality Control Inspector courses. IREC is the premiere credentialing body in the energy industry. REE received accreditation for its Energy Auditor and Quality Control Inspector curricula in September 2015 and for the Retrofit Installer Technician and Crew Leader courses in December 2016.

REE also became a certified test facility for Building Performance Institute (BPI) certifications in February 2016. This process included building specific test props for use in field practical exams. Currently, REE is one of only three facilities in the country certified to provide testing for all four BPI HEP certifications.

KHC is using REE's certification as a BPI test facility and its IREC accreditation to develop a new revenue stream for the corporation. Certification testing is offered to industry professionals outside of the Kentucky WAP at market rate. We also develop and deliver training courses, and provide consulting services to partners and industry professionals outside of the Kentucky WAP.

### **Results**

KHC's multifamily developers were educated on ventilation requirements and together with DCR, determined an acceptable course of action to resolve deficiencies allowing the project to be completed. The largest urban areas in the state, Louisville and Lexington Solar Kentucky events each saw attendance double from the previous year. Attendees and coordinators attributed the increased attendance to the free education sessions offered. Twenty-two K-12 educators attended the NEED tour at REE. All were excited to learn about the REE center, building science, WAP, and other KHC efforts to keep housing affordable for Kentuckians.

### **Effectively Use Resources**

KHC tapped into existing resources developed for the Weatherization Assistance Program and grew them into a comprehensive, multi-pronged approach to educating the public, retrofit industry, developers, and staff to promote awareness of, challenges to, and benefits of energy efficiency.