

# **Bedpans, Baked Beans, and Businessmen: Changing the Business Practices that Drive Energy Use in Hospitals, Grocery Stores, and Commercial Real Estate**

*Jane S. Peters, Research Into Action, Inc., Portland, OR*  
*David Cohan, Northwest Energy Efficiency Alliance, Portland, OR*  
*Marjorie McRae, Research Into Action, Inc., Portland, OR*  
*Rick Kunkle, Washington State University, Olympia, WA*

## **ABSTRACT**

The Northwest Energy Efficiency Alliance (NEEA) market transformation approach in the commercial sector is to change business practices so that energy efficiency becomes standard practice. The current BetterBricks Initiative was funded in July 2005. The three vertical markets targeted in this initial funding cycle are hospitals, regional grocery stores and commercial real estate. In December 2007, after just over two years in effect, there has been a substantial change in business practices for hospitals and increased change for regional grocery stores, with the real estate initiative just getting underway in 2008.

Since 2005, NEEA has learned that the process of truly changing business practices is hard to implement for both end-users and energy efficiency organizations. Most businesses do not have the capability on staff to make these changes, nor is this capability readily available in the marketplace. The tools and products that are needed to facilitate this transition need to be specific to the business type. Most organizations are already lean and adding additional capability is rarely an option, though the savings from such a position might be substantial. Thus, the BetterBricks Initiative is critical to facilitate this change.

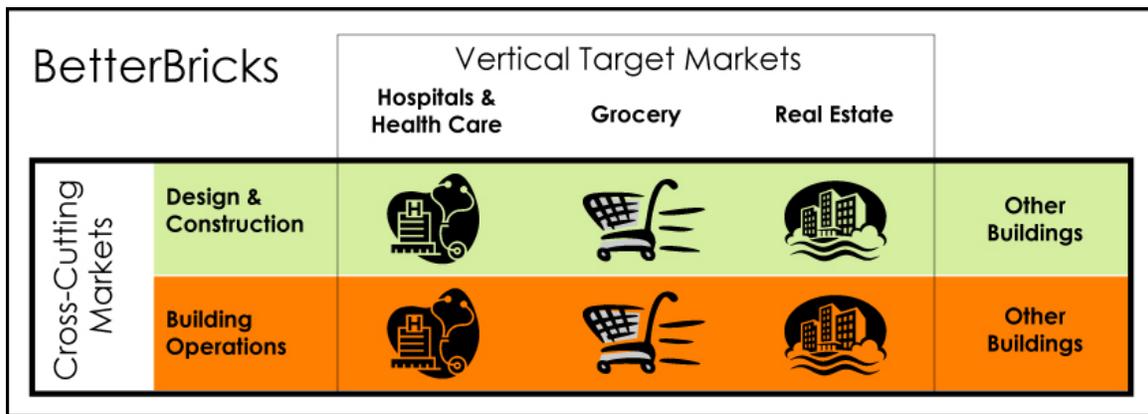
The services that BetterBricks' contractors (known as market specialists) provide increases the pace at which these organizations are able to move. The need for this "hand-holding" currently appears to be even greater than was anticipated at the outset of the BetterBricks program and should be expected by those embarking on this process. Yet, business practice change does appear possible and invaluable.

## **Introduction**

In 2005, the Northwest Energy Efficiency Alliance (NEEA) moved fully to a commercial sector effort targeted at changing business practices to improve the energy efficiency of Pacific Northwest businesses. This program effort, the BetterBricks Initiative, has the following long-term goals to be achieved by 2010:

1. **Make energy efficiency an integral part of business decision-making.** Within targeted vertical markets, change energy-related business practices to achieve energy efficiency in design and construction, and in building and facility operations. Create natural market demand for related trade ally products and services.
2. **Transform trade ally products and service offerings within the crosscutting design and construction and building operations markets to deliver high performance (energy-efficient) buildings.** Align trade ally business resources and build market capabilities to meet and increase market demand.

The BetterBricks Initiative is targeted to three vertical markets (hospitals, grocery stores, and commercial real estate) and two crosscutting markets (building operations and design and construction) that provide services in the commercial sector, as displayed in **Figure 1**.



**Figure 1.** BetterBricks Markets

In December 2007, a team led by Research Into Action, Inc. completed market progress evaluation reports (MPERs) on each of the three vertical market efforts, including the third MPERs for hospitals and grocery stores and the first MPER for commercial real estate (McRae, Peters & Lutzenhiser 2008; Peters & Bliss 2008; Peters, Kunkle & Dethman 2007). This paper discusses some of the lessons learned after the first two years of implementation of the BetterBricks Initiative.

## Description of Vertical Market Initiatives

The three vertical markets were selected following a market assessment to identify sectors with high electric energy use, as well as potential for responsiveness to a message about changing business practices (Schick & Tumidaj 2002). The three market initiatives are structured to specifically address the business needs of each of the vertical markets. Each initiative has its own value proposition, its own approach to products and services for its market, and its own initiative manager and market specialists who work in the field with key decision-makers.<sup>1</sup> The initiative manager and market specialists can draw on the expertise and services provided by the crosscutting market initiatives (building operations and design and construction) for in-depth studies, draft action plans, integrated design assistance, and so on. Finally, the initiative teams are supported by the development of education and training materials and sessions, and by marketing support in the form of collateral, media stories, case studies, and the BetterBricks.com website.

## Overall Approach

The three vertical markets targeted are among the largest electricity-consuming commercial building types in the Pacific Northwest. Many companies in these sectors have participated in local energy conservation programs sponsored by their utilities, yet they continue to consume large amounts of electricity at their facilities and generally do not know how to pursue investments that will result in long-term energy savings. Market transformation goals are to change the market in such a manner that financial incentives are no longer required for end-users to be willing to seek the benefits of energy efficiency investments on their own. Most energy organizations hope that, over time, this will happen as a result of positive experiences with energy-efficient products and services, yet the experiences of NEEA and the local utilities in the Pacific Northwest demonstrate that financial incentives for efficiency improvements are not enough to get businesses to incorporate energy efficiency into their standard business practices. The BetterBricks

<sup>1</sup> The real estate initiative is using market specialists for product and service development, but they have not yet been deployed in the field.

approach adds two components to the local utility funding of cost-effective energy efficiency measures: (1) relationship building; and (2) products, tools, and services to support energy efficiency decision-making. Together with financial incentives, these provide a classic three-legged support system for energy efficiency. In the future, it is expected that incentives will not be as necessary, as firms that change their business practices become willing to fund these investments on their own.

The general steps taken in each market begin with the development of a value proposition stating the return that can be gained from energy efficiency investment in terms that are relevant to the specific market. The market specialists—individual contractors with BetterBricks who have expertise and contacts in the market sector—work with the target firms to develop a plan, again specific to the market and the organization, which outlines the goals, objectives, and approach that will be taken to achieve the potential return. The tools, products, and services needed to accomplish this return are provided by the BetterBricks market specialists, BetterBricks product and service contractors, and by the BetterBricks crosscutting initiatives: building operations and design and construction.

## **Hospitals and Health Care**

The High Performance Hospitals Initiative began at a low level in 2003, with full-scale implementation in mid-2005. The first of the vertical market initiatives to launch, the Hospitals Initiative is more developed than the other initiatives and has had greater impact to date on its market.

The initiative operates with a single program manager supported by four market specialists—consultants under contract to BetterBricks who work directly with hospitals to create organizational change for sustained energy efficiency. Oregon, Idaho, and Montana hospitals are each served by a single, locally-based market specialist; Washington hospitals are served by a market specialist team. There is also a team of specialty contractors that assist in developing tools, products, and materials for hospital and market specialist use. The market specialists work with targeted hospitals to develop and then implement a *strategic energy management plan* (SEMP), which is characterized by the following elements: a business case for energy management that identifies the financial return from long-term investments in achievable energy savings (as determined by benchmarking and scoping studies); a commitment to ensuring cost-effective energy efficiency through corporate policies that govern procurement practices, design and construction practices, facility operations practices, equipment upgrades, and energy commodity management; and monitoring and tracking of progress toward goals.

The market specialists typically initiate contact with a hospital staff member in the facility manager role. It is seldom a cold call; they often have met the facility manager (or even a hospital executive) in prior market work, or are invited by the utility representative to make contact. Although the market specialists typically are engaged primarily with the facility manager, they have learned they must get executive interest early in the process. The initiative's value proposition, discussed below, greatly assists in this process. Building a relationship with an executive, as well as with the facility staff, is a key role of the market specialist. Ideally, a team comes together within a hospital to develop a SEMP, with team members representing facility operations, design and construction, and hospital management or financial operations.

Once a SEMP is developed and signed by the chief executive officer (and sometimes the board of directors), the market specialists assist in plan implementation. Typically, the first step is the creation of an action plan for facility operations and upgrades. Early experience suggests that SEMP implementation requires even greater cross-functional work by the market specialist than SEMP development. Changing business practices for procurement and new construction involves complex technical issues, as well as complex organizational concerns. Not surprisingly, change is uneven within and across organizations. Market specialists expect to work (on a part-time basis) with an organization for two or more years.

After nearly three years, seven health care organizations of all sizes, and comprising 36 hospitals, have signed SEMP's and are actively taking steps to bring about a comprehensive change in their business practices. These 36 hospitals account for 24% of the hospital beds in the region. The organizations range in size from a community hospital with 143 beds to a large system with nearly 4,000 beds. Another three organizations comprising an additional 7% of the region's beds are working with market specialists, with the intention of developing a SEMP. Finally, another five organizations comprising an additional 5% of the region's beds have interactions with the initiative, are aware of its benefits, and are contemplating development of a SEMP. (These three groups of health care organizations collectively comprise 44 hospitals with 36% of the region's beds.)

## **Grocery Stores**

The BetterBricks Grocery Stores Initiative was the second initiative to be implemented in the commercial sector, beginning its full-scale implementation phase in January 2006. In 2007, the initiative includes a program manager and a single market specialist. The market specialist works with grocery store management at both the executive and facility management levels, though the typical entry-point has been facility management. The main tool that the market specialist has used to reach grocery store management has been benchmarking. He has benchmarked the energy use of many of the regional chains and, in the process of benchmarking a chain, has been able to use the information to show chain management the range of performance for their local stores in comparison to both each other and to other regional chains.

Additional services the market specialist provides includes assistance in developing an Action Plan (similar to a SEMP), an energy-tracking tool that enables chains to more easily track their energy use and trace the effects of different actions, and an energy-awareness video that will be used to educate grocery employees on how to do their jobs in ways that will reduce the energy costs of operating the store.<sup>2</sup>

Refrigeration is the largest single type of electric-energy-consuming equipment in grocery stores. The initiative works with the specific refrigeration service provider firms that contract to grocery stores participating in the Grocery Stores Initiative. The services BetterBricks provides include training and tune-up demonstrations at local stores where the refrigeration service provider for the chain learns solutions from a technical expert to improve the energy efficiency of the system with which they are most familiar. The refrigeration service provider firms that agree to work closely with BetterBricks then receive additional business development support to permit them to create a business approach that will enable them to sell the enhanced capability to other grocery chains.

After two years, the market specialist and market manager are in touch with 10 of the 27 regional chains that account for 30% of the total number of regional stores and 34% of the retail grocery area of regional chains in the four Pacific Northwest states. Among these chains, two are currently committed to actively taking steps to adopt comprehensive change in their business practices.<sup>3</sup> These two chains account for 4% of the regional grocery market floor space. The program market manager is also working directly with one of the 21 refrigeration service providers on changing their business practices, and has provided training on refrigeration tune-ups to five of the 21 service providers in the region.

## **Commercial Real Estate**

The BetterBricks Real Estate Initiative is the third initiative to be implemented, beginning its development when BetterBricks hired a program manager in March 2006. The main target market of the

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<sup>2</sup> The energy-tracking tool is still in development; the energy-awareness video will be released in January 2008.

<sup>3</sup> Additional market specialist resources might have attained speedier commitment from grocery stores and is being considered for 2008 and 2009.

initiative consists of managed commercial real estate and does not include owner-occupied buildings. The initiative advocates for changes to energy-related business practices among real estate firms that own and manage office buildings in the Pacific Northwest, with the goal of having these firms develop a “high-performance portfolio” of buildings. This will occur through four steps consisting of: (1) gaining commitment and resources from leadership; (2) assessing current practices and building performance, and creating goals and strategies; (3) implementing the strategies; and (4) capitalizing on the strategies by capturing the value in market transactions.

A significant part of the initial development effort has been the creation of the *High Performance Portfolio Framework* and key issue briefings by the project manager and a team of development contractors. The Framework is a high-level guide for office real estate owners and managers for improving energy efficiency in all aspects of real estate management, including new construction, existing buildings, building sales and acquisitions, and tenant and investor marketing. Key issue briefings support the Framework and provide further details about “business areas where energy and profitability intersect.”

The Real Estate Initiative is also striving to develop market relationships and increased credibility for BetterBricks by working with organizations such as the Building Owners and Managers Association (BOMA) to sponsor training programs like the BOMA Energy Efficiency Program (BEEP) and events such as an Executive Summit and an Office Building Benchmarking Showdown. In 2007, BEEP was successfully offered throughout the Pacific Northwest as a co-sponsored activity of BOMA and NEEA, typically with support from a local utility. Next steps include completing development of key tools and resources, and testing and validating those tools and market delivery approaches. This will allow the initiative to begin to provide services to real estate firms utilizing market specialists, utility staff, and other BetterBricks resources.

## **Lessons Learned**

MPERs are prepared each year to provide an annual assessment of market progress for the initiatives and are used by the initiative managers and by BetterBricks management to make decisions on their investments in these activities. They are a valuable resource for lessons learned from the early years of implementation of the vertical market initiatives. These lessons illustrate the challenges for both end-users and energy efficiency organizations to changing energy-related business practices.

## **The Role of Relationship Building**

Businesses rely on relationships for success and it is the value of relationships that the BetterBricks initiatives seek to expand on with the use of market specialists to work directly with firms to change business practices affecting energy use. Creating business practice change fundamentally involves connecting with an organization’s staff. Building trust and credibility is critical for relationship building. Necessary skills for the market specialists include the ability to connect with people in an organization, process facilitation skills, and expertise in their field.

**Connecting People Whose Decisions Affect Energy Use.** In hospitals, staff specialization is high and it is difficult to gain communication across the organization. In grocery stores, cost competitiveness has led to such lean staffing that there are not enough people to do all the things that need to be done. In commercial real estate, consolidation and structural disconnects between the parties involved (owners, managers, tenants) make it difficult to focus attention on energy. The value of market specialists is that they can move around organizations, talk to the right people, and bring together the people who need to talk to each other in order to create momentum for moving forward with the process. In hospitals, market specialists make appointments with executives and with facility and construction managers; and, because of the SEMP, the

meetings happen. In grocery stores, a similar process occurs; but with fewer roles in regional chains, it has been effective to require all parties be in meetings in order to proceed.

**Facilitating the Process.** Market specialists support a business as it develops a more comprehensive approach to energy management. In most organizations, no one has ever done such strategic planning or orderly implementation of energy efficiency, so it is daunting for someone within the organization to try to do so. The market specialists assist internal staff on tasks such as: determining who should be at meetings and setting the agenda (including moving the discussion along over time); summarizing the progress made, who is to do what in the future, and checking in that they've done it; writing draft pieces; researching how things are really done in the organization; bringing in technical expertise to identify opportunities and savings; and motivating, encouraging, and convening the next meeting, and so on.

**Providing Expertise.** Finding people with appropriate knowledge and expertise is critical for success. In most situations, the in-house staff is quite skeptical of the possibility that an outside expert they do not know will be able to address their needs. Thus, the outside expert needs to actually know more, while also being respectful of the in-house teams. BetterBricks has learned they need multidisciplinary teams, as well as multilevel teams, in order to have expertise with each type of decision-maker within an organization.<sup>4</sup> One person may be able to talk effectively with the executives, but not with the facility staff, and vice versa. The outside experts need to be very familiar with the conditions the audience they are dealing with face on a day-to-day basis. They need to be able to speak the language of their audience and not talk up or down.

In both the hospital and the grocery sectors (since they are furthest along), there have been situations where an otherwise well-respected energy efficiency expert working with the BetterBricks building operations or design and construction crosscutting markets, came into the hospital or grocery store with little on-the-ground experience in that type of business. In these situations, the energy efficiency expert made recommendations that were not specific enough to the business needs, or made recommendations that might be good for an office building but were dangerous in a hospital. These situations nearly stopped the progress with that particular organization because the expert was not, in fact, more expert than the client organization on some important issues.

Ultimately, the in-house staff and management need to feel that they have been doing a good job and that the outside expert is a bonus of working with BetterBricks. The outside expert needs to really know the issues so that they are able to truly provide help in an effective and efficient manner. BetterBricks has a few times learned the hard way of the damage to the relationship that occurs when the advice it offers fails to meet the mark.

## **Tool and Product Development**

Relationships—even improved relationships—are not enough. Businesses need information, knowledge, tools, and services to increase their capability to change their business practices. BetterBricks led off both the Hospital and Grocery initiatives with relationship building, thinking that it might be enough. Market specialists were hired and started to talk to business contacts. Immediately, it became apparent that tools and products were needed. But two simultaneous problems emerged:

1. A complete set of tools and products that would truly meet the needs of the business type were not readily available in the marketplace.
2. NEEA needed expertise and market intelligence in order to create tools that would be effective with the specific business sector.

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<sup>4</sup> The teams are comprised primarily of contractors to NEEA that work part-time on BetterBricks. These contractor experts have been found through networking and some trial and error.

The tools were critical because when the market specialist found an organization or business that was ready to say, “Let’s go!” they needed support to move forward. The type of tools that were needed included benchmarking, energy tracking systems, and a lifecycle-cost analysis tool. Products and services needed included education and training courses for operations staff, technical expertise in specific energy efficiency improvements, templates for the energy plan (whether SEMP, Action Plan, or Implementation Plan), and methods of integrated design and high efficiency design practices. A list of “typical” commercial-sector energy efficiency measures is not sufficient for creating comprehensive business practice change

However, creating tools, products, and services that are adaptable and account for the specific needs and constraints faced by the business or organization has not been easy. Challenges include: finding the right expertise in the market to develop the tools/products/services; making the tool/product/service specific enough for an organization to act on while allowing for adaptability; providing substance, while making the tool/product/service accessible; and responding to current market conditions while allowing for different circumstances in the future. Initially, BetterBricks has sought tools/products/services in the market (nationally, as well as in the Pacific Northwest), but this has often been unsuccessful. While some ENERGY STAR® and utility-developed tools have proven useful, BetterBricks has spent a great deal of time developing tools/products/services before introducing them to the market. In other cases, market specialists have cobbled together something to meet an immediate need. BetterBricks has learned it needs a balanced approach that enables tools to be refined and adapted based on market feedback. Of course, “balance” is an elusive goal. The progress of the Grocery Store Initiative, in particular, has been slowed by the lack of tools/products/services in the market, while the Hospitals Initiative has found more market offerings to work with.

It is critical to engage the market during development so that approaches and the associated tools and products are tailored to the specific market. For example, BetterBricks’ initial vision for all vertical markets was that a business would create and then officially adopt a SEMP. An early learning was that the form and level of formality of the plan—even its name—needs to vary by market sector. While the term *strategic energy management plan* has some resonance in the hospital sector due to the presence of complex organizational structures, in the regional grocery sector, the concept was found to be more complex than needed. Grocery stores tend to function with a checklist, and therefore a single-page Action Plan makes sense. An Implementation Plan will be the comparable document for the real estate sector, where neither “SEMP” nor “Action Plan” resonates with real estate professionals.

## **Gaining Traction in the Organization**

The BetterBricks team learned early on that to gain traction in an organization, they need to identify the “value proposition” for each market sector to state the various benefits from energy efficiency in ways that are relevant for that particular organization. A key component is translating energy savings to a value meaningful to the market sector. BetterBricks tells hospitals that dollar savings from energy cost reduction go directly to the bottom line, where \$50,000 in energy savings is equivalent to \$1,500,000 in revenues for a hospital with a 3% operating margin. In grocery stores, the language is to improve cash flow, where \$1 in energy savings equals \$50 to \$80 in increased sales revenue. In real estate, the value proposition is that energy savings leads to increased net operating income, which leads to increased asset value. Though non-energy benefits are included in the full value proposition (such as recognizing the contribution of energy management to hospitals’ missions of stewardship and community health), it is this monetization of savings in sector-specific terms that bridges the knowledge divide between facility staff and corporate financial management, enabling facility managers to communicate effectively with executives about the benefits of improving energy efficiency.

The value proposition shouldn't be limited to just energy. It is becoming apparent that because of the organizational resources and commitment necessary for implementation, it is important to also consider water, reduction of waste stream from operations and new construction, sustainability in general, and efficient processes for capital projects (avoiding costly change orders).

**Making the Value Proposition Work.** Translating the value proposition concept to the specific organization requires technical expertise and time spent getting to understand the savings potential of the facility. Such an assessment needs to be completed with the involvement of the facility management staff so that they know savings goals are feasible. The SEMP, Action Plan or Implementation Plan integrates the value proposition, the savings goals, and a clear statement of management commitment, and it opens the door for management attention to efficient facility operations. The plan shows how all the pieces fit together to ensure that a comprehensive approach is taken. It sets forth priorities, goals, and an orderly approach that lets everyone see the value of each single step, and then the steps after that. By supporting the business objectives, the plan is less likely to be disregarded.

Early experience suggests organizations that want to change business practices will need a dedicated staff person—not necessarily a full-time job, but more than simply “one more thing” on the job responsibility list. Among hospitals with SEMP, several have created energy or resource management positions, recognizing that they will more than pay for themselves.

Early experience also suggests the staff resources should be outside of the facilities group in large organizations; in smaller organizations like regional grocery chains this is not yet clear. There are several reasons for the need to locate outside of facilities. First, facility operations are (typically, and comparatively) the easiest to change. Often the facilities group is excited about the opportunity to run the building “right” with executive commitment and increased resources. Second, within large organizations there is typically a knowledge divide: the facilities department deals with operations, another group deals with new construction, and yet another group with equipment procurement. Finally, because changing business practices crosses so many groups in large organizations, it is useful to have the lead for the business practice change be located under an executive whose purview encompasses the entire organization, such as a hospital's Chief Financial Officer or, for commercial real estate, the Vice President for Property Management.

**Changing Perceptions of Energy.** The market is changing how it views energy, sustainability, and climate change, which must be recognized when engaging organizations. In all sizes of organizations, motivations and interests are beginning to coalesce around the value of sustainability and resource efficiency.

There are business risks for not paying attention to this. The BetterBricks Real Estate Initiative is facing a much different level of interest as it is being launched in 2008, with real estate firms already creating internal positions like Corporate Sustainability Manager. The grocery chains that have been the first to take hold of the Action Plan idea are including this as part of their sustainability initiatives, finding sustainability to be meaningful to their staff and to their customers. The hospitals committed to SEMP have expressed a clear link between their missions to promote healthy communities and the wise use of resources.

## **Conclusion**

The conclusions from the first two years of the BetterBricks Initiative are, first of all: truly changing business practices to enable energy efficiency to be standard practice is hard for end-users and for energy efficiency organizations to do. Even the best of intentions and commitment by business management is not enough. There are key skills and resources that are needed to facilitate the process, and most businesses do not have the capability or staff to do this, nor is this capability readily available in the marketplace.

Secondarily, the tools and products that are needed to facilitate this transition so each specific business type has the capability to change their business practices do not exist in the marketplace. To be effective, tools and products—as well as the technical services that facilitate energy efficiency—need to be specific to the business type. Developing these tools and products will take time and a dedication of capital and knowledge.

This is something that BetterBricks hopes the market will begin to provide, as it will likely exceed the program funding capability. The tools that are needed for each specific business sector are: a value proposition; a benchmarking approach and tool; energy tracking tools; lifecycle-cost analysis tools; lists of specific facility opportunities, along with quantification of costs and savings; an integrated design approach that matches the geographic location and the business type, along with energy-efficient design opportunities and specific activities constituting efficient operations; procurement specs; and training and education for operations staff.

Thirdly, it is expensive for businesses to do energy efficiency. Most organizations are already lean and adding additional staff is rarely an option, though the savings from such a position might be substantial. Energy is not a priority, even when there is commitment and even in market segments that are “high energy users.” The things that are required by the business to effectively serve its customers take priority over energy efficiency—even with a meaningful value proposition.

Finally, given how hard it is for end-users to find the time, knowledge, skills, and money to change their business practices so that energy efficiency becomes standard practice, the BetterBricks Initiative is critical to facilitate this change as businesses begin to respond to the challenges of treating energy strategically. The services the market specialists provide as they help organizations find knowledge and skills offset internal staff requirements for changing their business practices, increasing the pace with which these organizations are able to move. These services, combined with enabling organizations to gain access to funding from their local utilities, are what are leading to real change among the hospitals and grocery chains already engaged in BetterBricks, and will be important to the commercial real estate sector as the program evolves. The need for this “hand-holding” currently appears to be even greater than was anticipated at the outset of the BetterBricks program and, for other utilities and public benefits organizations embarking on this process, should not be underestimated.

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