

Toolkit for Collective Purchase Initiatives

Community guide to collective purchase
for energy efficiency in Maine



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Additional digital resources and information available online at
efficiencymaine.com/at-home/collective-purchase

This toolkit is intended as a guide for project planners who want to create their own collective purchase initiatives to promote energy efficiency in Maine homes.

Efficiency Maine has developed this toolkit to help locally based collective purchase initiatives get started and can answer questions about Efficiency Maine programs. A successful initiative offers residents:

- ⇒ community organizing support,
- ⇒ technical assistance,
- ⇒ project management, and
- ⇒ rebates toward weatherization and home heating system installation from Efficiency Maine.

A collective purchase initiative helps Mainers stay comfortable in their homes year round while also reducing energy use. Toward this end, communities are encouraged to organize their own initiatives to buy energy efficiency services and equipment from local contractors through collective, also called bulk, purchasing.

Collective purchasing can help homeowners overcome the logistical and financial barriers to weatherizing or installing new heating systems in their homes. At the same time, these initiatives can:

- ⇒ secure a good value and preferred price for homeowners,
- ⇒ save residents money by reducing their energy use,
- ⇒ generate demand for local energy service businesses, and
- ⇒ build community by coming together to make an informed home energy purchase with friends and neighbors.

Each initiative will be unique and fully operated by local leaders. Features, timelines, administration, and other details of a larger city or regional initiative will likely be different from those of a smaller village or neighborhood initiative. This Toolkit provides basic guidance and ideas around creating a project that works for you and your area.

Efficiency Maine can provide information about rebates, financing options, current technologies, and access to a network of registered vendors. Efficiency Maine claims no responsibility for the outcomes of local independent initiatives nor will Efficiency Maine be expected to administer any part of the initiatives.

About Efficiency Maine

Efficiency Maine is the independent administrator for energy efficiency programs in Maine. Efficiency Maine's mission is to lower the cost and environmental impacts of energy in Maine by promoting cost-effective energy efficiency and alternative energy systems. Efficiency Maine does this primarily by delivering rebates on the purchase of high-efficiency lights and equipment to help customers save electricity, natural gas and heating fuels throughout the Maine economy. Efficiency Maine is governed by a stakeholder Board of Trustees with oversight from the Maine Public Utilities Commission.



Why collective purchase?

- ⇒ Allow individual residents to receive a great value on energy efficiency services such as energy assessments, air sealing, insulation, and ductless heat pumps
- ⇒ Reduce confusion and simplify options for improving home energy efficiency
- ⇒ Leverage Efficiency Maine's rebates, loan options, trusted information, and network of contractors
- ⇒ Empower residents to actively manage and understand their home's energy needs
- ⇒ Unite communities



Who can organize and participate in collective purchase?

- ⇒ Cities, towns, neighborhoods, institutions, or networks who want to affordably reduce home energy use
- ⇒ Community organizations, governments, or teams willing to act as the hub for information, events, and coordination
- ⇒ Residents who want to reduce their home energy costs and improve comfort
- ⇒ Anyone who cares about supporting local businesses while improving energy independence



How does collective purchase work?

- ⇒ A community leader (organization, network, or government) spreads awareness and encourages interest from homeowners
- ⇒ Local events bring people together and provide guidance about technology, rebates, and financing options so residents can better understand what is available
- ⇒ Community leader solicits bulk pricing from local Efficiency Maine [Registered Vendors](#) and passes that information along to homeowners
- ⇒ Residents opt in to desired energy services—such as energy assessments, weatherization services, and/or heating equipment installations—at bulk pricing rates
- ⇒ Contractors work directly with residents to perform the services at the agreed upon prices or rates
- ⇒ Efficiency Maine is available to answer questions about its programs, rebates, and loans throughout the process

Project Checklist

1 Begin

Identify or create community entity to act as project lead and hub (Community Lead)

- Seek an entity that is well-connected and well-respected in the local area.
- Community Lead should have capacity to coordinate events and communicate with residents and contractors, have organizational and networking capabilities, and be able to keep the initiative on track.
- Set goals or priorities for the initiative and establish a timeline.

2 Share

Community Lead will: Engage the population

- Reach out to residents through events (workshops, potlucks, etc.), social media, word of mouth, newspapers, community access TV, community networks, and other avenues.
- Encourage interested homeowners to sign up. (NOTE: This ensures they stay engaged, even if they do not end up participating.)
- Organize a technical assistance session with Efficiency Maine information and/or participation. Interested homeowners can learn more about technology, rebates, loans, and energy assessments. Emphasize the cost-saving financial incentives available.

3 Connect

Community Lead will: Coordinate with local contractors

- Find local contractors using Efficiency Maine's [Registered Vendor Locator web tool](#).
- Provide contractors with (1) approximate number of interested homeowners; and (2) specifications of work or services. Request fixed prices and/or rates (e.g., for energy assessment, air sealing, insulation, installation of heat pump) that reflect bulk purchase.
- Hold an event where residents can see pricing, meet the contractors, and schedule services.
- Be available to monitor progress and follow-up with contractors and homeowners as projects are completed.

4 Celebrate

Community Lead will: Publicly recognize the hard work and the outcomes of the initiative

- Check in with homeowners after work has been completed to assess their satisfaction with the process and services.
- Plan fun culminating event to celebrate the initiative.
- Share success stories and lessons learned with Efficiency Maine, initiative stakeholders, and other communities in Maine.
- Plan second phase if there is more interest.

The following pages include more information about each of the above steps in the process for a collective purchase initiative.

Example Roles of Stakeholders

	Community Lead	Volunteers	Contractors	Efficiency Maine
Planning	Manage initiative; connect residents to resources	Brainstorm ideas for outreach and initiative design		Answer questions and connect Community Lead to resources
Outreach	Manage campaign; recruit volunteers; create print and web materials; convene and lead workshops	Assist with creating and distributing web/print materials and planning events; spread the word		Present at workshops and/or provide information; reach out to contractor and stakeholder network
Request for Proposals (RFP/ Solicit prices)	Issue RFP and track responses	Assist with drafting RFP; connect with contractors	Respond to RFP	Advise on RFP
Enrollment	Gather and maintain list of interested homeowners; plan event for homeowners to meet contractors and schedule work	Spread the word: invite neighbors and friends; assist with planning and executing event(s)	Attend event(s) and come prepared to schedule projects with interested homeowners	Attend event(s); offer information on relevant rebates and loans for qualifying projects
Installations	Stay in touch with homeowners and contractors to address any issues that arise	Assist Community Lead in tracking projects in homes	Execute projects and install systems; provide feedback to Community Lead	Answer questions about Efficiency Maine rebates and loans
Financial Incentives	Fundraise from local sources to help defray customer costs (optional)	Assist Community Lead in fundraising (optional);	Assist homeowners to apply and receive Efficiency Maine rebates for qualifying projects	Process and pay rebates for qualifying projects; close loans
Celebration	Survey customers and contractors after work is completed; compile data and surveys into report and evaluate; replicate!	Plan/host a celebration	Plan/host a celebration	Share success stories with other interested communities

1

Getting started. Find a trusted non-profit, municipal government, local institution, network, or other community entity that can act as a leader and hub for the collective purchase initiative. This leader will facilitate events, engage the population, reach out to local registered vendors, and connect vendors to homeowners. In this Toolkit, this role will be referred to as the Community Lead.

The Community Lead should be a well-respected and well-connected entity or individual in the community. The Community Lead should also be able to dedicate staff and/or volunteer time, and it should have the administrative, project coordination, and organizational skills needed to keep the project on track.

Collective purchase works because it combines volume based pricing and Efficiency Maine rebates to homeowners to enable them to make the energy efficiency upgrades which will improve their comfort and save them money. Some groups leverage other available sources of funding to further decrease the cost to the homeowner. For instance, the City of Bangor allocated money to layer another rebate on top of those already offered by Efficiency Maine bringing the homeowner's cost even lower through their EnergySmart Bangor initiative.

Once the Community Lead is identified, assign an individual to be the primary point person for the initiative. This person could be a local energy champion or known community connector who is supported by or affiliated with the Community Lead. To ensure success, cast a wide net to seek volunteer and stakeholder participation to provide plenty of helping hands plus greater community reach and investment.

Next, create a timeline and goals or priorities to give the initiative structure. Examples of tasks include (1) organize the initiative; (2) get the word out and sign up interested homeowners; (3) connect with contractors and solicit prices/rates (4) contractors meet homeowners and schedule work in homes; (5) contractors perform and complete projects; and (6) wrap up and celebrate.

Examples of Community Leads

- ⇒ Local chapters of environmental non-profits, land trusts, or conservation groups
- ⇒ Faith-based community organizations
- ⇒ Municipal government staff or council/select board members
- ⇒ Institutions such as colleges, universities, hospitals or large businesses that can offer the initiative to their employees
- ⇒ Local or regional networks such as service organizations, sports teams/leagues, or any membership organization
- ⇒ Neighborhoods, condo or homeowner associations

2

Share the message. Reach out to your intended audience; gather interested homeowners and increase awareness. Outreach and communication about the initiative may look different for each group. Consider the targeted audience and deliver messaging appropriate to them. Use simple language and messaging that reflects their priorities. Use platforms (social media, email, group presentations, potlucks, posters, etc.) that are likely to reach your audience.

The Community Lead should decide how best to reach out to the group to solicit interested homeowners. This could be through messaging about the collective purchase concept in writing or in-person at a series of events. The Community Lead should establish a time period during which homeowners can indicate that they would like to be included in the initiative and learn more (although their signup at this time does not bind them in any way to participation in the later stages). The focus should be on getting the word out and getting as many homeowners on board as possible. The Community Lead, with feedback from the group of interested homeowners, should decide if weatherization services, efficient heating systems, or both, are the focus of the collective purchase.

The Community Lead should hold at least one technical assistance session where homeowners can learn more about the options. Efficiency Maine can support these sessions by providing information about general home energy efficiency, technologies and options, rebates, and financing.

Tips for Messaging and Outreach

- ⇒ Consider creating a name for your initiative like the City of Bangor did with EnergySmart Bangor (<http://www.bangormaine.gov/energysmartbangor>). A compelling group identity increases familiarity with the concept and enhances a community's sense of shared purpose.
- ⇒ Print materials (even a business card) are helpful to have on hand and give away at events or on the counters of local businesses to provide awareness of the campaign.
- ⇒ Take advantage of existing community events to spread the message. Examples include farmer's markets, craft fairs, and church, library, or school events.
- ⇒ Establish a social media presence. It's free and provides a place to share events, updates, create a buzz, and connect participants.
- ⇒ Leverage existing email and mailing lists maintained by local organizations. Ask them to include messages about the initiative in their regular communications.
- ⇒ Gather people for a fun event such as a potluck, skill share, or holiday party. Using that time to discuss the initiative keeps it fun and encourages community connection.
- ⇒ Share the message directly among friends and neighbors. This is an effective way to build trust.
- ⇒ Use free online tools to gather names and organize lists, create posters or other print materials, design presentations, delegate tasks, collaborate on documents, schedule meetings, and other functions. These tools can help you to work more efficiently.

3

Connect to local contractors. This is an important function of the Community Lead.

Once a preliminary list of interested homeowners is assembled, use Efficiency Maine’s online [Registered Vendor Locator Tool](#) to find and contact energy service contractors in your area. You may want to consult with potential contractors ahead of time for their guidance on providing flat fees for energy assessments, and rates for air sealing, and insulation services. This also gives them notice that there will be a bulk purchase coming up so they can work with you to meet the needs of the group. Due to many variables, contractors may or may not be interested in providing services to the initiative. Many will be happy to participate; collective purchase saves them from time-consuming and expensive marketing efforts and delivers ready customers. Make calls and send emails to local contractors until two to five have agreed to submit pricing/rates for the requested services. Generally these contractors should be within an hour driving distance of the community.

Each local group may determine what services to include in the initiative, such as weatherization (air sealing and insulation installation) and energy efficient heating system installation. In addition, pricing should be solicited from energy advisors for home energy assessment services. Note that air sealing and insulation projects require an energy assessment performed by a certified energy professional from Efficiency Maine’s list of [Registered Vendors](#) prior to work being completed in order to qualify for Efficiency Maine rebates and loans.

Try to standardize requests for pricing/rates so contractor submissions can be fairly compared and assessed. Require contractors to provide hourly rates, equipment specifications, and a set price for energy assessments in writing to the Community Lead. Contractors should provide preferred pricing based on the volume of interested homeowners associated with the initiative. Once a satisfactory number of responses have been received, the Community Lead should evaluate them and choose the participating contractors. Reference the ‘Sample Request for Proposals (Heat Pumps)’ in the Appendix of this document for more information about requesting pricing and rates from contractors.

An expo or fair is a simple way to allow group members to meet and see the pricing of the participating contractors. Ideally, homeowners will have the option of scheduling the work with their chosen contractor at the fair. Caucusing is another model that can work for smaller groups where each contractor is set up in a large room and homeowners gather around their preferred contractor. This model allows for tiered pricing where the contractor can decrease prices on the spot based on the number of participants who have chosen them. The larger the group, the lower the price.

The Community Lead may decide on the best approach for a fair based on the group, space, schedule, and participating contractors. When homeowners select the services and the contractor they plan to use, standard contractual obligations apply and the homeowner is responsible for coordinating payment and work directly with the contractor. Additionally, the Community Lead should monitor progress on projects and be prepared to follow-up with contractors and homeowners as projects are completed.

After the initial fair, consider hosting a mid-initiative event where people can come together to discuss progress on their home projects. The Community Lead could connect people who have gone through the process already with those yet to have work done.

A sample, editable RFP for heat pumps can be found on the website: efficiencymaine.com/at-home/collective-purchase and on pages 13 and 14 of this toolkit.

4

Celebrate and wrap up. Hold an event once work has been completed in the majority of participating homes. Taking time to honor everyone’s hard work is an important step. This time can be used to reflect on your successes and challenges and build further community cohesion around local energy efficiency efforts.

In addition to boosting connection and morale, the celebration allows a time for gathering feedback (1) from specific homeowners about their home improvements; and (2) from everyone about overall project organization and operation. The Community Lead can send out a formal survey or simply record thoughts and lessons learned from the participants and organizers.

Gather data and share it with Efficiency Maine, stakeholders, and other interested communities. This data could include (1) number of participating households; (2) type of improvements done in each household; (3) average project cost; (4) pre- and post-work energy assessment information; and (5) any other relevant information that helps to tell the story of the initiative. The Community Lead can combine the data, photos, case studies, and testimonials into a report. This will help the group and Efficiency Maine to share the experience with others.

For many groups, the first round of collective purchase creates awareness and brings more people around to the concept. Going through the process once and having a successful outcome gives the initiative legitimacy and may encourage more homeowners to participate. Where there is capacity and interest, the Community Lead can plan to implement future rounds of collective purchase, improving the process as they go. Taking the time to write a report with aggregated data, resources, and lessons learned is a great first step to a successful second, third, or fourth round.

Ideas for Celebration

- ⇒ Hold a house party in a participating home and ask the homeowners give a short tour or presentation on their experience.
- ⇒ Host an event in the community space where project workshops were held.
- ⇒ Invite everyone who participated as well as newly interested people and potential future participants.
- ⇒ Ask contractors who participated if they are willing to help plan, host, or sponsor an event.
- ⇒ Take photos and use these in the report and in communication for future rounds.

Appendix

Samples and resources from other initiatives

Editable files are available for download: efficiencymaine.com/at-home/collective-purchase

Sample Sign-up Sheet for Interested Homeowners

Homeowner Interest Form for Energy Efficiency Collective Purchase
Your town or group name here

Homeowner Name:		
Address:		
Phone:	Home:	Mobile:
Email:		
Check those Services that interest you:	<input type="checkbox"/>	Energy Assessment & Air Sealing
	<input type="checkbox"/>	Insulation (Ceiling, attic, walls)
	<input type="checkbox"/>	Ductless Heat Pump Installation

Homeowner Name:		
Address:		
Phone:	Home:	Mobile:
Email:		
Check those Services that interest you:	<input type="checkbox"/>	Energy Assessment & Air Sealing
	<input type="checkbox"/>	Insulation (Ceiling, attic, walls)
	<input type="checkbox"/>	Ductless Heat Pump Installation

Homeowner Name:		
Address:		
Phone:	Home:	Mobile:
Email:		
Check those Services that interest you:	<input type="checkbox"/>	Energy Assessment & Air Sealing
	<input type="checkbox"/>	Insulation (Ceiling, attic, walls)
	<input type="checkbox"/>	Ductless Heat Pump Installation

Homeowner Name:		
Address:		
Phone:	Home:	Mobile:
Email:		
Check those Services that interest you:	<input type="checkbox"/>	Energy Assessment & Air Sealing
	<input type="checkbox"/>	Insulation (Ceiling, attic, walls)
	<input type="checkbox"/>	Ductless Heat Pump Installation

An editable Excel file is available for download from our website: efficiencymaine.com/at-home/collective-purchase

Sample Request for Proposals (Heat Pumps)

Contractor: _____ Contact: _____

Email: _____ Phone: _____

Request for Proposals by _____

Email your Proposal as an attachment to _____ no later than _____ . I will confirm receipt.

Our collective purchase group is soliciting proposals for the installation of heat pump systems in our homes. The group includes several individual homeowners. Some group members may wish to purchase several units or multi-head systems. The purpose of this request is to acquire information from a number of contractors regarding the cost (installed) of the heat pump units described below.

After the submission deadline, we will schedule a meeting where each contractor will have twenty minutes to meet with our group's members, answer their questions, and offer more information about your offer. At the conclusion of the meeting, members will have an opportunity to indicate a contractor preference.

Description of service requested: The sale and installation of single mini-split heat pumps meeting all Efficiency Maine program criteria listed at the bottom of this RFP, priced for individuals or groups of eight or more buyers. For the purpose of providing a fair cost comparison between contractors, please assume:

- ⇒ 16 feet Line Hide or similar (Please include: one 90 degree ell, one wall inlet, one end fitting.)
- ⇒ 20 feet line set
- ⇒ Brackets with vibration dampening features for models mounted on house
- ⇒ Exterior units must be mounted above the level of snow drifts typically experienced at the location of the installation
- ⇒ Exterior unit to be installed on same wall as interior unit
- ⇒ Exterior unit to be mounted on wood framed wall
- ⇒ Home construction to be wood frame with clapboard or shingle siding

PLEASE NOTE: It is assumed that contractors will be prepared and willing to meet with homeowners individually to answer questions and size/locate these or other units appropriately before the homeowners commit to purchase, and that units with greater heating capacity, multiple heads or different design type - floor or ceiling units for example - may be purchased for an adjusted price in lieu of the units listed above.

Costs below to include purchase, installation and sales tax: (before incentives and tax credits)

Costs to include a fee of _____ for contractor to pull HVAC and electrical permits, with a "cost plus" arrangement for problematic permits.

Contractors may assume for the purposes of the price quotes below that there is an exterior electrical outlet within 25' of the outside units ultimate location, and that no rain cap is necessary.

Item: (Cost for single installation)

Manufacturer	Model	Rated capacity (btu)	HSPF	Bid Price
		9000		
		12000		
		15000		

Customer discount per unit (if 8 or more units are purchased by group members from you): \$_____

Please describe what is included with each installation: (electrical, carpentry etc.)

Please describe what additional features are available and at what cost:

COST OF INSTALLED RAIN CAP / SMALL ROOF (RECOMMENDED IF CONDENSER LOCATED UNDER HOME ROOF DRIP LINE):

UPGRADE OF THERMOSTAT TO CONTROL CENTRAL HEATING SYSTEM AND HEAT PUMP.

OTHER:

Warranty Information:

Please speak to your company’s ability to provide follow-up service and repair:

Are you fully insured to do air source heat pump installations, and do you hold all current certifications/licenses that are required to do this work?

Circle one: Yes No

(If no, please explain.)

Efficiency Maine Ductless Air Source Mini-Split Heat Pump Installation Guidelines

- All line sets that are visible from the building exterior must run through duct covers.
- Line set length must fall within manufacturer-specified range (i.e., min < installed length < max)
- Refrigerant lines must be tested, evacuated, purged with nitrogen, and charged with refrigerant per the manufacturer’s recommendations and installer training. Insulation must cover full length of line sets (no exposed copper).
- Outdoor units must be mounted on brackets or a platform in a non-obstructing location that is high enough to avoid snow cover and typically no less than 24” above grade and be protected by rain caps or a small roof if installed below the home roof drip line.
- Units must be wired per manufacturer’s recommendation including installation of shut off box adjacent to outdoor unit. Shut off box with slow fuse is suggested for extra safety where not specifically required by the manufacturer.
- All electrical work must be performed by a licensed electrician or as legally permitted by an oil burner technician or homeowner with manufacturer recommended cables, materials, and methods in compliance with the National Electrical Code. Local Code Enforcement Officials retain final jurisdiction over minimum qualifications and permitting requirements for installations.