

STATE OF VERMONT
Department of Public Service

SCOPE OF WORK

Third-Party Evaluation of Low- and Moderate-Income Energy Programs

In Response to Vermont Public Utility Commission
Case No. 25-0443-INV

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1. Background and Purpose

A recent review by the Vermont Department of Public Service (DPS or "the Department"), conducted in response to the Vermont Public Utility Commission's (PUC) first Request for Information in Case No. 25-0443-INV, identified approximately 100 distinct programs operating across the state that serve low- and moderate-income (LMI) customers. These programs, administered by a diverse array of state agencies, utilities, municipalities, and nonprofit organizations, are intended to directly or indirectly reduce energy-related costs across the thermal, transportation, and electric sectors.

Despite the breadth of this program portfolio, the programs operate under distinct and largely uncoordinated statutory mandates. Fragmentation in program design, funding structures, and delivery mechanisms creates the potential for service gaps, duplicative efforts, inconsistent participant outcomes, and inefficient use of public and ratepayer dollars. At a time of significantly rising energy costs, a comprehensive review of these programs is necessary to ensure optimally effective and efficient delivery of complementary services. To date, however, the Department has not yet had access to a standardized, cross-sector analytical framework to systematically evaluate and compare these programs' effectiveness against one another, let alone identify and pursue opportunities for program integration.

This Scope of Work (SOW) directs a qualified third-party evaluator (hereinafter "the Evaluator") to undertake a comprehensive audit, synthesis, and comparative analysis of the full portfolio of approximately 100 LMI energy programs. The evaluation will serve as a foundational resource for the Department as it develops recommendations to the PUC regarding program improvements, funding reallocation, and policy reforms that maximize energy affordability for Vermont's LMI households while advancing the state's greenhouse gas (GHG) reduction goals.

2. Objectives

The evaluation shall accomplish the following core objectives:

- Conduct a comprehensive inventory and audit of all identified LMI energy programs, documenting program design, administration, funding, eligibility criteria, service delivery mechanisms, and reported outcomes.
- Identify areas of overlap, duplication, and inefficiency across the program portfolio that may reduce the collective impact of available resources.
- Assess the cost-effectiveness, participation rates, and affordability impacts of individual programs and program clusters.
- Identify potential synergies to integrated, coordinated service delivery across programs, sectors, and administering entities, and the barriers to securing these synergies.
- Examine how current state energy programs are funded — including federal, state, ratepayer, and other sources — and identify opportunities to reallocate dollars in ways that more effectively reduce energy burden for LMI households.
- Identify strategies to mitigate risks posed by the intermittent or uncertain availability of federal, state, or other external funding streams.
- Develop a standardized analytical framework that enables the Department to evaluate and compare programs across sectors on a consistent, apples-to-apples basis — serving as a durable tool for ongoing portfolio management.

3. Scope of Work

3.1 Program Inventory and Audit

The Evaluator shall compile and validate a comprehensive inventory of all approximately 100 programs identified in the DPS review, supplemented by any additional programs identified through stakeholder outreach or independent research. For each program, the Evaluator shall document the following at minimum:

- Program name, administering entity, and statutory or regulatory authority
- Target population and eligibility criteria (income thresholds, geography, fuel type, housing tenure, etc.)
- Program type and service delivery mechanism (e.g., bill assistance, weatherization, electric vehicle incentives, appliance replacement, community solar, etc.)
- Energy sector(s) served: thermal, transportation, electric, or multi-sector
- Funding sources, funding amounts, and funding cycle or duration
- Annual program budget and expenditure history (minimum three years where available)
- Number of participants served annually and participation trends
- Reported program outcomes, including energy savings, cost savings to participants, GHG reductions, and any other tracked metrics
- Data collection and reporting practices
- Known program strengths, gaps, or operational challenges

The Evaluator shall obtain data through a combination of document review, database analysis, and structured interviews with program administrators, state agency staff, utility representatives, and

community-based organizations. The Evaluator shall describe its methodology for data collection and note any programs for which data are incomplete or unavailable.

3.2 Overlap, Duplication, and Inefficiency Analysis

Using the program inventory as a foundation, the Evaluator shall conduct a systematic analysis to identify areas where programs overlap in purpose, eligibility, or service delivery in ways that may create redundancy or administrative inefficiency. The analysis shall specifically examine:

- Programs serving the same or substantially similar populations with similar interventions
- Geographic concentrations of programs versus service gaps
- Administrative duplication, including redundant application processes, eligibility verification systems, or reporting requirements that impose costs on administrators or barriers for participants
- Instances where program silos prevent participants from accessing a coordinated bundle of services that would yield greater energy burden reduction

The Evaluator shall distinguish between overlap that is genuinely duplicative and redundant versus overlap that serves complementary purposes or reflects the diversity of LMI household needs. The Evaluator shall provide concrete examples and, where data permit, estimate the resources associated with identified inefficiencies.

3.3 Cost-Effectiveness and Participation Assessment

The Evaluator shall assess the cost-effectiveness and participation performance of programs across the portfolio. This analysis shall include:

- Cost per participant and cost per unit of energy savings or bill reduction, where data are available
- Comparison of cost-effectiveness across similar program types and sectors
- Participation rates relative to eligible populations, including assessment of barriers to enrollment and retention (e.g., application complexity, language access, awareness, landlord-tenant dynamics, etc.)
- Analysis of which populations are systematically underserved by existing programs, including renters, rural residents, households with non-traditional fuel sources, non-English speakers, and households facing multiple intersecting energy burdens
- Assessment of program outcomes relative to stated goals and, where benchmarks exist, relative to comparable programs in other states

The Evaluator shall note methodological limitations, particularly where inconsistent data collection practices across programs constrain direct comparison.

3.4 Funding Structure and Reallocation Analysis

The Evaluator shall conduct a detailed analysis of how the LMI program portfolio is currently funded. This analysis shall:

- Map funding sources for each program, including federal allocations (e.g., LIHEAP, WAP, IRA incentives, etc.), state general funds, electric and gas utility ratepayer charges, and other sources
- Identify the relative stability, flexibility, and conditionality associated with each funding stream

- Identify programs or populations that are overly reliant on a single, potentially volatile funding source
- Evaluate whether current funding mechanisms align resources with the programs and populations demonstrating the greatest need and the highest potential for energy burden reduction
- Identify opportunities to reallocate, restructure, or layer funding streams to improve aggregate impact without requiring new revenue
- Assess options for creating or strengthening funding mechanisms that provide stability and continuity when federal or other external funding is reduced, delayed, or eliminated — including bridge funding strategies, reserve mechanisms, and state funding backstops

3.5 Synergies, Barriers, and Coordination Opportunities

The Evaluator shall assess the landscape of potential program synergies and structural barriers to coordinated delivery. This work shall include:

- Identification of program combinations or delivery models — whether co-enrollment, coordinated referral, or integrated service delivery — that have demonstrated or are likely to produce greater energy burden reduction than programs operating independently
- Assessment of administrative, statutory, regulatory, or institutional barriers that prevent coordination, including conflicting eligibility criteria, incompatible data systems, siloed funding streams, and/or lack of shared performance metrics
- Review of models from other states or jurisdictions that have successfully integrated or coordinated LMI program delivery, and assessment of the applicability of those models to Vermont's policy and administrative context
- Identification of quick-win coordination opportunities that could be implemented without significant statutory or regulatory change

4. Standardized Analytical Framework

A central deliverable of this SOW is the development of a standardized analytical framework that enables the Department to evaluate and compare LMI energy programs across sectors, program types, and administering entities on a consistent basis. The framework shall be designed as a practical, durable tool for ongoing portfolio management — not solely for use in this evaluation — and shall be adaptable as programs, data availability, and policy priorities evolve.

4.1 Framework Design Requirements

The analytical framework shall:

- Define a common set of metrics and indicators sufficient to characterize program affordability impact, cost-effectiveness, participation performance, equity outcomes, and GHG co-benefits
- Establish standardized definitions for key terms (e.g., "energy burden," "LMI," "cost-effective," "participant") to enable consistent application across programs with different existing definitions
- Accommodate programs across the thermal, transportation, and electric sectors while remaining sector-neutral in its core structure

- Account for programs with different primary objectives (e.g., direct bill assistance vs. long-term efficiency investment), providing appropriate sub-frameworks or scoring adjustments where direct comparison is not meaningful
- Incorporate a tiered approach that distinguishes between a minimum data set required of all programs and enhanced data elements for programs with more robust evaluation infrastructure
- Be transparent, replicable, and auditable — with clear documentation of data inputs, scoring methodologies, assumptions, and limitations
- Be structured to allow for aggregation: so that individual program scores can be rolled up to assess the performance of program clusters, sector portfolios, or the full statewide portfolio

4.2 Core Framework Dimensions

At minimum, the framework shall address the following evaluative dimensions. The Evaluator may propose additional dimensions with justification:

Dimension	Description
Energy Burden Reduction	Estimated reduction in household energy costs as a percentage of household income, attributable to program participation.
Cost-Effectiveness	Total program cost relative to energy savings, bill savings, or energy burden reduction achieved per participant or per dollar expended.
Participation and Reach	Number of participants served relative to the estimated eligible population; geographic and demographic reach; enrollment and retention rates.
Equity and Access	Degree to which the program reaches the most energy-burdened households; presence or absence of barriers to participation; outcomes for specific underserved populations.
GHG Co-Benefits	Estimated GHG emissions reductions associated with program participation, where applicable.
Funding Stability	Characterization of funding source reliability, conditionality, and vulnerability to interruption.
Data and Reporting Quality	Quality, consistency, and completeness of program data collection and reporting practices.

4.3 Framework Deliverables

The Evaluator shall deliver the framework in a format suitable for ongoing use by Department staff, including:

- A written technical methodology document explaining the framework design, data requirements, scoring approach, and limitations
- A program scoring tool (e.g., spreadsheet or database interface) pre-populated with data collected during this evaluation, and structured so that it can be updated as new program data become available
- A user guide for Department staff explaining how to apply the framework to new or modified programs

- Recommendations for data collection and reporting standards that, if adopted, would improve the Department's ability to apply the framework consistently over time

5. Key Deliverables

The Evaluator shall produce the following deliverables. Proposed timelines shall be confirmed with the Department at contract execution and shall be subject to revision by mutual agreement.

Deliverable	Description	Proposed Timeline
Inception Report	Detailed work plan, stakeholder engagement strategy, data collection plan, and preliminary inventory structure. Includes initial findings from document review.	30 days from contract execution
Interim Program Inventory	Draft database of all ~100 programs with standardized program profiles. Identifies data gaps and requests for supplemental data.	90 days from contract execution
Draft Analytical Framework	Proposed standardized framework with scoring methodology. Submitted for DPS review and stakeholder comment prior to finalization.	120 days from contract execution
Draft Evaluation Report	Full draft of all analyses described in Section 3, incorporating the finalized framework. Includes findings, conclusions, and preliminary recommendations.	180 days from contract execution
Final Evaluation Report	Revised final report incorporating DPS and stakeholder feedback. Includes executive summary, all appendices, and policy recommendation matrix.	210 days from contract execution
Analytical Framework Tool & User Guide	Completed scoring tool pre-populated with evaluation data, accompanied by full technical methodology documentation and user guide.	210 days from contract execution
Stakeholder Briefing Presentation	Slide deck and oral presentation of key findings and recommendations, suitable for delivery to DPS, PUC, and other stakeholders.	Upon delivery of Final Report

6. Qualifications and Organizational Requirements

The Evaluator shall demonstrate the following qualifications:

- Demonstrated experience conducting program evaluations in energy efficiency, low-income energy assistance, or related sectors, including experience working with public utility commissions or state energy offices
- Technical expertise in cost-effectiveness analysis, program evaluation methodology, and energy burden analysis
- Familiarity with federal low-income energy assistance and weatherization programs, including LIHEAP, the Weatherization Assistance Program (WAP), and relevant Inflation Reduction Act provisions
- Capacity to conduct qualitative and quantitative research, including structured stakeholder interviews, survey design, and statistical analysis
- Experience developing decision-support tools and analytical frameworks for use by government agencies
- Familiarity with Vermont's energy policy landscape, utility regulatory environment, and LMI program ecosystem is preferred but not required

Proposals from multi-organizational teams are welcome, provided that roles and responsibilities of each partner are clearly defined and a single prime contractor is designated as accountable for all deliverables.

7. Stakeholder Engagement

The Evaluator shall develop and implement a structured stakeholder engagement plan as part of the evaluation. Engagement shall be designed to supplement document review with qualitative insights from program administrators, participants, and advocates, and to ensure that the evaluation and framework reflect the realities of program delivery and participant experience.

Stakeholders to be engaged shall include, but are not limited to:

- Vermont Department of Public Service staff
- Vermont Public Utility Commission staff
- Vermont electric and gas distribution utilities
- Efficiency Vermont and Energy Action Network
- State agencies administering relevant programs, including the Department of Housing and Community Development, Agency of Transportation, Agency of Natural Resources, and others as identified
- Community action agencies and nonprofit organizations administering LMI programs
- Representatives of LMI household populations, including tenant advocates, rural community organizations, and organizations serving non-English speaking residents
- Federal program contacts where relevant to Vermont program design and funding

The Evaluator shall submit its stakeholder engagement plan as part of the Inception Report and shall document engagement activities and key findings in the final report.

8. Data Access and Confidentiality

The Department will facilitate Evaluator access to program data held by state agencies and, where possible, assist in coordinating data requests to utilities and other program administrators. The Evaluator shall be responsible for obtaining necessary data access agreements and for handling all data in accordance with applicable state and federal confidentiality requirements.

All data, reports, analyses, and work products produced under this contract shall be the property of the State of Vermont. The Evaluator shall not publish or publicly disclose any work product without prior written approval from the Department.

Where program-level data are confidential or commercially sensitive, the Evaluator shall present findings in aggregated or anonymized form as necessary to protect confidentiality while preserving the analytical utility of the evaluation.

9. Proposal Requirements

Interested parties shall submit a proposal that includes the following components:

1. **Technical Proposal:** A narrative description of the Evaluator's proposed approach to each element of the Scope of Work, including methods for program inventory, data collection, stakeholder engagement, framework development, and analysis. The technical proposal shall demonstrate understanding of the evaluation objectives and the Vermont program landscape.
2. **Work Plan and Timeline:** A detailed work plan with milestone schedule and proposed timeline for all deliverables identified in Section 5.
3. **Organizational Qualifications:** A description of the proposing organization(s), key personnel, and relevant experience. Include resumes or CVs for all proposed project leadership.
4. **References:** Contact information for at least three prior clients for whom the Evaluator has conducted similar work.
5. **Cost Proposal:** A detailed budget with line-item cost breakdown by task and deliverable, including labor categories, hours, and rates; direct costs; and any subcontractor costs. The cost proposal shall be submitted as a separate document from the technical proposal.

10. Evaluation Criteria

Proposals will be evaluated on the following criteria:

Criterion	Weight
Technical approach: clarity, rigor, and innovation in proposed methodology	30%
Organizational qualifications and relevant experience of key personnel	25%
Quality and feasibility of proposed work plan and timeline	20%
Cost reasonableness and value	15%
Familiarity with Vermont energy policy, programs, and stakeholder landscape	10%

11. Contract Terms and Administration

The selected Evaluator will enter into a professional services contract with the Vermont Department of Public Service. The contract will include standard State of Vermont contract terms and conditions. Key administrative provisions shall include:

- The Department's designated Project Manager will serve as the primary point of contact and will be responsible for reviewing and approving all deliverables.
- The Evaluator shall participate in regular progress check-in calls with the Department's Project Manager, no less than monthly and more frequently during intensive work phases.
- Payment shall be tied to acceptance of deliverables as specified in the contract payment schedule.
- The Department reserves the right to request revisions to any deliverable prior to acceptance.
- All subcontracts must be approved in advance by the Department.
- The Evaluator shall maintain records sufficient to support all work billed under the contract and shall make such records available to the Department upon request.

Questions regarding this Scope of Work should be directed to the Vermont Department of Public Service.