Our Power Neighborhood Energy Team Guide

Version 1.0, Compiled by Timothy DenHerder-Thomas

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What Is Our Power?

In 2009 and 2010, energy issues became prominent in the Midtown neighborhoods of Minneapolis as local businesses faced concerns with black-outs and power surges and resident groups worked in opposition to Xcel Energy's plans to develop a high-voltage transmission line along the Midtown Greenway (now moved to underground on 28th Street). In late 2010, residents and local businesses came together to identify shared goals around helping residents and businesses save energy, generating clean energy locally, and creating local jobs and cost savings through energy solutions. In 2011, 37 community members came together over five months to brainstorm the core elements of a community energy plan for South Minneapolis. Our Power emerged from a need to engage many more community members in this effort and help people take action towards energy solutions immediately.

Our Power is a coalition of organizations, local businesses, and community members based in the Midtown area of South Minneapolis. We stand together in creating an energy future that is:

- Affordable: everyone can afford their needs for heat, electricity and transportation.
- Stable: we have reliable access to energy without blackouts or huge energy price shocks.
- Healthy: our energy supports the health and quality of life of our neighbors and others around the world.
- Job Creating: we invest the dollars we spend on heating, electricity, and transit in energy sources that create jobs in our community and build wealth in the local economy.
- Environmentally Sustainable: our energy choices sustain the environment that supports our community, all beings across the planet, and future generations.

Our Power is hosted by Grand Aspirations with support in business outreach efforts from the Latino Economic Development Center. Several neighborhood organizations, community institutions, and citizens groups, along with dozens of individual neighbors have kept the coalition going. Between summer 2011 and fall 2013, Our Power volunteers have door-knocked 12,000 households across Midtown and engaged 150 local businesses and almost 600 residents in taking action to save energy and generate clean energy locally. We create solutions by:

- Listening to, engaging, and sharing the broad range of concerns, needs, and ideas from the many diverse people and groups that make up our community.
- Ensuring that everyone has access to the information and tools they need to confront their own energy costs and participate in creating a better energy future.
- Clarifying the many existing programs and services already out there so residents and businesses don't have to navigate a maze of confusing opportunities.
- Working person-to-person to create new action teams and community energy solutions led by people in our community.
- Building community power towards local hiring and local business development, easier financing for improvements, and better support for local energy development from the City, County, State, utilities, and existing organizations and businesses.

Everyone is welcome to participate, share, co-create, and guide this campaign at whatever level you want! You can learn more at www.mnourpower.org

OUR POWER

What Is an Our Power Neighborhood Energy Team?

Across South Minneapolis, people are taking action. Hundreds of us have already participated in programs like Community Action and Community Energy Services to save energy in their own homes. Many more have taken simple actions like changing out light-bulbs, sealing air-leaks, installing low-flow water fixtures, and more. Midtown has also been a hotbed for community-level action, from involvement in the Hiawatha Transmission line project and the 2013 Minneapolis franchise negotiations to neighbors getting together to contract for insulation and solar as a group. Yet so many people in our neighborhood are still struggling with expensive, unreliable, and unhealthy energy and don't have easy access to existing ways to take personal, neighborhood, or city or statewide action.

In the face of such an overwhelming and complex problem, it can be hard to step forward alone. That's why neighbors across South Minneapolis are working together to create solutions.

Our Power Neighborhood Energy Teams are about neighbors creating spaces for neighbors to build community, share inspiration and concrete skills, provide mutual support for action, and work together to create the future we want to see. Neighborhood Energy Teams can be:

- Block groups, either formal or informal
- A team of friends
- A group at a place of worship
- A group of students, teachers, or parents,
- Part of an existing organization or workplace, or
- Any other group committed to working together to create energy solutions in our community.

Neighborhood Energy Teams can help people act at any or multiple levels:

- Personal – Supporting each other in taking direct action to save energy for each household
- Community – Working together to create energy trainings, neighborhood work parties, bulk-buying groups for insulation, solar, or other energy services, and more
- City/State – Engaging in planning and policy initiatives at the neighborhood, City of Minneapolis, and State level to create access to energy solutions locally.

Our Power is providing Neighborhood Energy Teams in the seven Midtown neighborhoods with:

- Tips and ideas for what you can do
- Support developing your own ideas and plans
- Information, connections, and technical support for accessing existing programs and campaigns to advance energy solutions
- Reimbursements for the costs of community events
- Neighborhood-wide parties where participants can share their stories, help each other, and build community
- A blog where participants can share their work with each other and the broader community

List of Activities and Support Available:

As a part of a Neighborhood Energy Team, how you take action is up to you. The majority of this guide provides some ideas that have been used by other groups, and resources that are available for you to use. If you want to develop other ideas or get neighbors involved in another way, the Our Power campaign would love to provide whatever support we can and learn more about what you are doing to help share those ideas with other neighborhood leaders.

Each of the following ideas includes instructions on how you could implement it, tips and options for making it effective, and information about how Our Power can support you. After this list of ideas is information about a few places where you can share what your Neighborhood Energy Team is doing with others in the community, or ways to get more support:

- House Party/ Block Party/ Community Party
- Block Chalking/ Street Art
- Monthly Neighborhood Energy Competition
- Weekly Energy Tips
- Weatherization Work Party
- Promoting Community Action and Community-Energy Services
- Insulation or Solar Bulk-Buying
- Taking Action at the Minneapolis level and Beyond

Each idea identifies ways Our Power can help. To access any of these forms of support or to contact us with more question or information, you can either stay in touch with the Our Power intern already in touch with you or contact: mnourpower@gmail.com, (612) 548-1333 or look up more information at: www.mnourpower.org

You are welcome and encouraged to come up with your own ideas for projects and neighborhood action plans. Please feel free to contact Our Power for input and support developing ideas of your own. If you have already started something or do so in the future, we'd love to help get the word out to other neighborhood groups that might want to replicate it.

House Party/ Block Party/ Community Party

Why: Host a house party, block party, or other community event to help people get to know each other, learn more about the issue, and start taking action. Parties build community, allowing people to build trust and connections that motivate us to take action together, and increase community safety.

Venues for a Party:
Think about who you are looking to invite to the event (how many, where are they, what spaces are accessible to and feel welcoming to them, what times they are available). Be aware that certain places of worship may not be comfortable for people of other religious backgrounds, certain buildings may not be accessible to people with certain physical constraints, you don't want a space that is too small or too large, you want to choose a time when the people you want to invite are available and likely to come. Some possible venues include.

- Your house, if you feel comfortable hosting and have a group size you can easily host.
- A local school, place of worship, park or park building, or community center/ meeting space that is well known and easily accessible.
- Your street during National Night Out (Tuesday August 6th 2013, usually the first Tuesday in August each year). To schedule a street closure for free, you must do so by July 23, 2013 at http://www.ci.minneapolis.mn.us/nno/nno_register. You can sometimes apply for street closures for other dates, but it is usually more difficult and not free.

Elements of a Successful Party:

- **Promotion:** Choose forms of outreach - word of mouth, door knocking, phone calls, fliers, emailing, etc. – that reach who you're inviting. It's not a party if no one knows about it.
- **Food.** If it's a small gathering with people who know each other, inviting everyone to bring food to share (a potluck) works well and builds community. Providing the food yourself can be more welcoming if you don't know the people you're trying to engage as well.
- **Time for Informal Conversation:** Make sure it's in the agenda. Use name tags and structured activities that ask people to introduce themselves and start conversations.
- **Entertainment:** Consider whether music, poetry, games, videos, or other entertainment could encourage people to come and help people stay engaged and have fun once they arrive. You can consider some of the other activities in this guide as examples.
- **Fun Activities:** Some ideas you could use to get people involved:
    - An activity or starting the process of any of the other activities in this guide
    - A sharing "show and tell" where neighbors share how they are saving energy
    - A visioning discussion for what you'd like to create together on the block
    - A movie screening, guest speaker, or training about energy issues (see pg. 15 for a list of possible topics Our Power can provide training on)
- **Invitation to participate/ act:** Have some clear opportunities for people to get involved. You could use a house party to introduce or offer any of the other activities in this guide. Create space for participants to discuss what they want to do and invite people to commit to action – don't assume or require that they will want to, but invite people to act.

How Our Power Can Help:

- By providing reimbursements up to $25 to help cover event costs and printed information
- By helping find a space, select a good time, or develop promotion strategy as needed
- By identifying speakers, facilitators, trainers, videos or activities as needed

Block Chalking/ Street Art

Why: Chalking energy consumption or using other street art makes our energy use and energy savings visible, making it a prominent issue on our block and helping people identify neighbors who can provide guidance. Use this method to help residents on your block start talking about their energy consumption with one another and get them thinking about ways to save energy and money. You can use chalking as a launching pad for engaging people in other action steps too.

What: Our Power will provide the chalk so people can chalk their usage on the sidewalk when they get their bill, instructions to hand to people, and a set of informational materials to help people take action. You can use the other ideas in this guide to add on to the chalking as well!

How to Do It:

1. Find other **Block Chalk** co-leader(s) who want to chalk and help organize others--could be existing block leaders, friends, neighbors. Or you can lead the block effort yourself.
2. Sign up to lead your block in chalking by contacting Our Power. For you and your co-leader(s), tell us your name, email, address, phone number, what block(s) you'll take on, and when/where we can give you chalk & supplies.
3. Our Power will deliver chalk, instructions, and informational materials.
4. Go door to door and talk to your neighbors or talk to them at a block event or meeting. Explain the idea and why you care about it. Ask them if they are willing to participate. Give them the instruction sheet (with a way to reach you) and a piece of chalk, help them chalk their sidewalk the first time right then and there if they are willing. Feel free to invite them to other events and activities (see the tips section).
5. A few days after you go around and you have some chalk down, contact Our Power to let us know it's happened. Send us the addresses where chalking was done and what was written or let us know that chalking has been done and we can send someone around.
6. Next month, go back out and check in with everyone. Ask them what they noticed, see if they want to do anything else to take action. Help them do it again. Let us know.
7. Repeat monthly until people begin to do it on their own. Each month, go back to people you have not reached yet and invite them to join in.
8. Stop during winter, but make sure everyone knows this is intentional and when to get started again. Or switch to a non-chalk method (online, door-signs, snow art, etc.).
9. Talk up **Block Chalk** and encourage others to contact us and organize their blocks.

What to Have People Write: Residents will write the month, electricity usage, and number of people in household on the sidewalk in front of their house based on their utility bill. It would look like this:

July: 385 kWh	OR	Aug: 150 kWh
4 people		1 person

Some pointers:
Month Abbreviations: To save chalking time and space, have people use three-letter abbreviations for months if they want.
Selection of the month to write: Use the starting month of the billing period if the billing period begins on the 15th of the month or earlier. Use the ending month of the billing period if the billing period starts on the 16th of the month or later. A 8/8/2012-9/7/2012 bill would be August. A 8/17/2012-9/18/2012 bill would be September.

Tips – a few ideas that could make this fly:

- Get a few friends to block chalk even before you go out asking your neighbors so you can point to it as an example.
- If you have phone numbers/ emails, it can help to call ahead or let folks know you are coming, but you should still physically hand them the chalk and instructions.
- If you have regular block meetings, discuss it and kick it off there even before you go around and talk to those who didn't show up.
- Set up a training for neighborhood kids and let everyone know the first time you go around. At the training, teach the kids how to read an energy bill and write down the right information. Put them in charge of doing it for their house each month.
- Post a large sign on the corner (make sure you get permissions from landowners and the City) explaining what the chalking is about and how to participate.
- After a month or two, host a neighborhood party to get folks together (see page 5).
- Share your success (and invite other neighbors to do so) by posting pictures and updates to the Our power blog (see page 14)
- Use block chalking to lead into other activities in this guide, or one you or other neighbors design.

We can help you figure out or plan any of these activities, just contact us.

Take it to the next level: Some residents in the Powderhorn Park neighborhood are taking this idea to the next level with street art. Instead of sidewalk chalk, they're considering using pavement paint and local artists to create large-scale artistic depictions of energy usage on the block. If you have the tools and interest to scale up, let us know!

How Our Power Can Help:
- By providing sidewalk chalk and instructions for residents in how to participate
- By providing printed educational materials as needed

Monthly Neighborhood Energy Competition:

Why: Creating a competition can help people get excited about saving energy and creates motivation for getting involved. This idea works best if you already have at least a small group of neighbors (people on your block, or a group of friends in the community) willing to participate – you can always have new folks join in later.

What: Each month for a number of months, compare changes in energy usage among a group of people participating. Identify a small prize for the person who saves the most each month. At the end of each month get together, compare energy bills, calculate percent savings per household, and award the prize. Invite the winners and runners up to share what they did to save energy.

What To Do:

1. Get a small group of people who want to compete together. Define the metrics you will measure each month (we recommend using either):
    - **a.** Your total electric, gas, and water bills (dollars) added together
    - **b.** Your individual consumption of one or more categories (kWh for electricity, therms for gas, or units for water). If you use gas as a separate category, the baseline should be the same month in the previous year, not the previous month, since changes in weather will dominate effects).
2. With the initial group, choose a prize and who will be awarded what prizes (ie, does the winner get everything, does 2nd place or 3rd place get anything, what happens in a tie? If you are using multiple categories (ie, electric, gas, water separately) how will prizes be distribute?). You could use:
    - **a.** A donation your group secures from a local business, for example you could talk to a hardware store about donating energy-saving light-bulbs
    - **b.** Cash: Ask everyone who wants to participate to pitch in a small amount ($2-5) to a pool that will be awarded to the winner.
    - **c.** Everyone dedicates an item or a service (define a range of value) to the pool. The winner gets the items or services. Services could include inviting the winner over for dinner or shoveling their snow.
3. Have an event when the contest begins (could overlap with a party, see page 5) where everyone brings their energy bills. All contestants write down their previous month's usage (the most recent bill they had) on a paper chart or enter into a spreadsheet as a baseline. Context organizers can also share helpful hints about how to save (see pg. 9)
4. Everyone goes home and try to reduce their energy cost through the next month.
5. After a full month, have everyone get back together and enter their information. Percent reduction= (1-(this month/last month))*100%. The person with the greatest reduction for the month wins. Award the prize, and invite the participants to share what they did.
6. Start the competition for next month. You can either use the most recently completed month as a baseline or use the average of the previous 3 months as the baseline.

How Our Power Can Help:

- By helping design the competition, prizes, and calculations to fit your goals
- By providing helpful hints, speakers, or other printed materials for participants
- Information about other calculators and toolkits to estimate savings

Weekly Energy Tips:

Why: Even once people are bought into saving energy, it can be hard to know exactly how to do it and to remember what to do. Once you have a group of people who want to participate, you can use weekly tips to provide reminders about how to take action. By asking people to share back how it went, you can get the conversation going and keep people engaged.

What: With the group, identify a good format for sending reminders. This could be by email, community newsletter, or by dropping a reminder off at their door. Create a clear way for people to share back on how it is going. Avoid doing this with anyone who isn't already on board with getting updates from you.

What To Do:

1. Talk with the block group or other team you're working with and identify a good way to distribute weekly energy tips. If it is a block group, you could put a post-card (Our Power can provide these) under everyone's door each week. If you meet weekly, a quick verbal reminder with a post-card to take-home could work well to. You can also use email or phone reminders if that works better. Define how long you are going to do it for.
2. Check in with Our Power to get a set of tips to use. We have seven energy-saving tips already printed on how-to cards, and we can identify and (if needed) print more.
3. Distribute by the identified method weekly.
4. Create a physical board, space for people to share verbally if you meet regularly, or online list-serve of forum for people to share how their action on the last tip went. You are always welcome to have your group post updates and reflections to the Our Power blog, where other community energy teams will be using too (see page 14).

Tips To Take The Idea Further:

- Try to engage people in sharing their experience as you share the tips. If you are going door to door, ask what impact it is having on their energy bills or home comfort. Check in on how the actions are going. If you're sharing tips online, ask people to reply to the whole group with updates on what's working best or post to the Our Power blog.
- As you identify people in your group who are excited and knowledgeable, invite them to create a tip or action for the group. If someone has an idea and you're not sure if it actually makes a difference, feel free to check in with Our Power.
- Part-way through or towards the end, start a new action like any of the others in this guide. Host a block party to discuss progress, or get people started on block chalking!

How Our Power Can Help:

- By providing printed tips and information you could use to share them.
- By answering questions about any energy-saving actions group members come up with
- By helping you identify ways to engage members of your group in sharing their stories.

Weatherization Work Party

Why: There are many small actions we can take in our homes that can save a lot of energy, but it's often hard to get motivated to invest the time and energy to do it. Some may also not know how to take these easy and convenient steps, or find it difficult to do themselves. Work parties where friends and neighbors come together to seal air leaks and make other simple do-it-yourself changes, build confidence, mutual support, and use many hands to make light (and fun) work!

What: Cooperative Energy Futures (CEF), an Our Power partner, supports residents in hosting weatherization work parties. A weatherization work party is an event (could be linked to a block party or house party) with a group of friends and/or neighbors who live in a relatively close geographic area (a block party format is excellent). Along with other party activities (eg. food, music, and conversation), a weatherization work party includes a brief training CEF will provide this in how to seal air leaks, put up window kits, and make other do-it-yourself upgrades to prepare your homes for winter. After the training, party attendees help each other get started on weatherizing their homes using materials and equipment provided at bulk rates from CEF.

What To Do:

1. Find a few friends or neighbors who want to join in, set a date (weekend afternoons are recommended; if the focus is on winter preparation, September is ideal), and contact CEF to get on their schedule ((612) 568-2334 or contact@cooperativeenergyfutures.com).
2. Use outreach (knock your neighbors doors, post fliers/ handouts, email/Facebook your friends) to invite others to join in. Check out page 5 for tips on effective events.
3. Plan (and advertise), food, music, and other fun activities alongside the work party. Plan at least 2 hours for the actual training and work in addition to fun hang-out times.
4. CEF will bring some required equipment (caulk guns, scissors, hair-dryer) and invite participants to bring whatever they have and will bring low-cost materials (tube caulk, rope caulk, window kits, weather-stripping.
5. CEF will provide a hands-on training in how to install these materials at the point in the party that makes sense for your event. If there are experienced neighbors/ party members on the planning team, they are encouraged to help lead the training and guide others.
6. Party participants work together to weatherize their homes.
7. Close with a celebration of the work completed, make sure everyone knows what to do if they need more materials/guidance, and identify the next community activity.
8. Some time later (1-3 months) check-in with participants and see how it is going.

Cost: CEF asks that work party organizing teams either pay $50 for coordinating the training or have at least 5 CEF members involved in the event. Anyone can become a CEF member, which also gives access to other programs and benefits, for a one-time membership fee of $25. See http://cooperativeenergyfutures.com/services/coop-membership/ for details. In addition to this organizing cost, CEF will provide materials for the work party at member rates (10% less than regular prices). You can view these products and prices on the CEF website (most are $2-$4): http://cooperativeenergyfutures.com/diyworkshop/products/

How Our Power Can Help:

- By providing additional materials about other opportunities at work parties

Promoting Community Action and Community-Energy Services

Why: Sometimes we know we need to do something, but just need a little help. Existing organizations can help make saving energy easier and more affordable through the programs they offer. Our Power helps residents connect to those resources to save more energy.

What: Our Power promotes two active programs for Midtown residents. The Home Energy Squad program of Center for Energy and the Environment provides homeowners of homes of 4-units or less with a home energy assessment, direct installation of energy-saving products, and recommendations as to what larger investments you may want to make, all for a discounted rate of $70. The Community Action Weatherization program helps low-income households (owners or renters) access home insulation and air-sealing for free through a federally-funded program. These programs are not run by Our Power, we just inform and connect residents to them. We encourage you to take advantage of these programs yourself, and to inform other households and neighbors about them through the other activities you undertake.

What To Do to Access the Home Energy Squad:
You are eligible for this program if you own your own home in Minneapolis (or a few surrounding municipalities) and you live in a building with four units or fewer. You can learn more about the program and how it works here: http://mncee.org/Home-Energy-Squad-Minneapolis/How-It-Works/

1. Get started by scheduling a home visit by Center for Energy and the Environment professionals at http://mncee.org/Home-Energy-Squad-Minneapolis/Sign-Up/
2. At the $70 home visit scheduled at your convenience, you will receive a full energy assessment similar to a utility audit, direct installation of a number of energy-saving products at no additional cost, and guidance and recommendations as to which additional improvements such as insulation and air sealing would help save energy in your home.
3. Get follow up and support on those additional actions recommended as needed.

What To Do to Access the Community Action Weatherization Program:
To have your home weatherized for free, the household (if a single unit) or at least 50% of residents (if multiple units) must qualify for the income guidelines. Homeowners and renters (with landlord permission) are eligible. Your building must also not have been previously weatherized by Community Action in the past 15 years. To receive free home weatherization that will dramatically reduce your energy costs, you must apply for Energy Assistance, which will pay part of your energy bills. Use this process to apply:

1. Submit the Energy Assistance program application (4 pages plus proof of income and your last utility bills). Visit http://www.campls.org/programs/energy-services/energy-assistance or call (612) 335-5837 to get an application.
2. Wait 6-10 weeks for your application to be processed. You will receive an award letter at the end of this period if your application is approved.
3. When you receive your award letter, call Community Action to request weatherization at (612) 335-5911. If you qualified for energy assistance, you will be automatically eligible unless Community Action has weatherized your building in the past 15 years.
4. After an energy assessment, contractors will weatherize your home free of charge. The process may take a month or more after you call (step 3).

Insulation or Solar Bulk-Buying

Why: After you and your neighbors have taken the basic steps by getting informed about energy issues and helping each other take personal actions to save energy, it's time to take the next step with some large-scale actions that make a much larger impact. Some of these steps, like hiring a contractor to insulate and air seal your home, or installing solar photovoltaic panels, are expensive, but working together with others in the community can drive down the cost while streamlining the process, ensuring quality, and helping each other navigate the process.

What: Cooperative Energy Futures (CEF), an Our Power partner, supports Minneapolis residents in hiring contractors as a group to insulate and air seal or install solar electric panels at bulk discounts. In the future as more neighbors identify other things they want to buy or contract for in bulk, CEF is looking to support and help organize group contracts or purchases for other upgrades too (energy-saving appliances, heating and cooling systems, and more). CEF helps teams of residents pick qualified contractors and high-quality products, coordinates the process to reduce confusion and duplicated research, and creates accountability among contractors.

What To Do:
If you want to simply sign up to be personally involved in a larger group project, visit the CEF bulk-buying page for details (http://cooperativeenergyfutures.com/bulk-buying/) or contact CEF to sign up ((612) 568-2334 or contact@cooperativeenergyfutures.com).

If you want to organize a group of neighbors to bulk buy a product or service together:

1. Identify a core team that wants to help bring neighbors together around this opportunity. If it's just you, you can still go to step 2 and CEF can help you identify others.
2. Contact CEF to let them know that you want to organize a project, learn more about what is available, and get support in the promotion process.
3. Reach out to neighbors with information about the opportunity. Keep in mind that only homeowners and landlords (if you talk to renters, they need to convince the landlord) have the ability to make decisions about these upgrades. Use emails, door-to-door, fliers, announcements at existing gatherings, etc. based on what will be most effective to reach people. Set an initial deadline for people to get back to you to express interest. Make sure to gather phone, email, and address info for those who are interested so they can be invited to a follow up event and let them know you will schedule a meeting.
4. Touch base with CEF to set up an event where interested neighbors can meet each other, understand the process, costs, and financing, and get their questions answered.
5. Host the initial meeting. Set a deadline 2-4 weeks after the meeting by which people need to sign up for the project and a deadline 2-4 weeks after that by which those who decide to go forward need to commit a down payment and letter of intent.
6. Coordinate with CEF to support people through the steps of the process (usually an assessment followed by a bid). CEF encourages community leaders to play a hands-on role, but can also coordinate projects when needed.
7. Repeat in later rounds if there is adequate interest. If neighbors want to follow up by buying or contracting for something else as a group, get going on that (CEF can help for energy-related services).

Taking Action at the Minneapolis Level and Beyond

As we work together to take action in our own homes and neighborhoods, we also create the role models for broader solutions across the city and state. As your neighborhood energy teams develop and take action, you may want to engage in helping promote and advance energy solutions at an even broader level. Here are two campaigns that your neighborhood team can get involved in at a city or state level:

Minneapolis: In Minneapolis, we have a once-in-a-generation opportunity to make cleaner, more affordable, and more local energy available to all in Minneapolis. In 2014 the city of Minneapolis will be renegotiating the franchise agreements that allow Xcel Energy (electric) and Centerpoint Energy (gas) to use the public right of way to deliver energy to everyone in the city. As this opportunity to define our energy future for the next 20 years approaches, the Minneapolis Energy Options campaign (MEO) has developed to keep our city's energy options open so we can secure an affordable, reliable, clean, efficient, and locally-controlled energy future for all. MEO seeks to:

- Help the city meets its climate change goals,
- Invest our energy dollars in clean, local, renewable energy instead of importing polluting energy,
- Eliminate the human and environmental health impacts from polluting energy that disproportionately impact low-income communities and communities of color,
- Increase local economic development in through green jobs that also reduce energy costs.

The MEO campaign has a great many ways that you can get involved in helping Minneapolis harness this opportunity. Learn more at www.minneapolisenergyoptions.org, and get involved at http://minneapolisenergyoptions.org/contact-us/

Minnesota: In 2013 and 2014, Minnesota is poised to make major advances around clean energy and energy efficiency policy, building off of the successes of the 2007 Next generation Energy Act. The Minnesota Clean Energy and Jobs Campaign aims to:

- Improve the states energy efficiency programs, creating more incentives for utilities to help residents and businesses invest in saving energy.
- Increase standards for renewable energy up to 40%, and encouraging local and community-based ownership of those clean energy sources.
- Create an additional 10% by 2030 Minnesota solar energy standard that would create a standard price that utilities would pay anyone to generate solar energy that reflects the full value solar energy provides to the grid. This would be accompanied by other policy changes to make it easier for anyone to benefit from installing local clean energy.

Across the state, Minnesotans are taking the lead to make the state a leader of the clean energy economy. Learn more about the campaign and contact the campaign to get involved at: http://www.cleanenergyjobs.mn/about/

How to Blog/ Share What You Are Doing

Why: As you get going on creating local energy solutions, other neighborhood energy teams will be taking on their own projects around you. Sharing stories of successes and challenges is a great way to learn from each other, and doing so in a publicly accessible format allows others to learn what is happening and find ways to get involved.

What: Our Power has created a free blogging platform to enable anyone in the community to share updates and stories about what you are doing with others. This blog serves as a public go-to place for community members who want to learn about what others in the community are doing to create local energy solutions. We encourage you to follow the blog via email (you'll be notified by email when someone posts) on the right side-bar at http://mnourpower.org/blog/.

Our Power also offers community gatherings and other events for neighborhood energy leaders to get together and swap stories and strategies in person. Visit www.mnourpower.org or ask to be added to our contact list to keep updated on events coming up.

How To Blog:

To add your own stories, pictures, or other content to the blog, you need to create a free Wordpress account and notify us so we can allow you to post. Here's how:

1. Create a free account on Wordpress unless you already have one. You can sign up for your own blog too by hitting that link, but there is no need to unless you wish to maintain a blog: https://signup.wordpress.com/signup/?user=1
2. Send the username you created or the email you used to create an account to mnourpower@gmail.com. We'll add you as an Author, allowing you to post.
3. You will then be able to log in at www.mnourpower.org/admin
4. Once you login, you hit "posts" > "Add New" on the left hand side. Add text, pictures, or other media to share your work. Contact us if you need help figuring it out.

If you're not familiar or comfortable with blogging, you can share things you want added to the blog by sending them to mnourpower@gmail.com or calling (612) 548-1333 to have us interview you. We can do the work of putting it online.

Tips on Effective Blogging:

- Regular participation is much more important than perfection. Sharing a short update every couple of weeks attracts more attention than a detailed post every six months.
- Keep it simple. Short, direct posts (100-600 words) are much more interesting for readers. If you're going to write a long post, have a short intro and then use the page break button to allow readers to read more if they want.
- Pictures are powerful. Take and add pictures from your activities. You can even do posts that are basically just a few pictures with a text caption. You can also add videos! Just make sure whoever is in your pictures/video gives you permission to post them.
- Tell stories - they are inspiring and interesting. Avoid using anyone's specific addresses or other personal information unless they give explicit permission to make that public.

Getting Further Information, Training, or Resources

Our Power is all about our community taking leadership over our energy challenges. If you need help finding more information, organizations that can provide support, other neighbors interested in similar things, or anything else, contact us and we'll see what we can do.

Training Topics:
Specific trainings we can provide to neighborhood energy leaders on request (we can also offer these at events, trainings, or workshops you host) include:

- How to build and support an effective team
- Facilitating Meetings
- Event/ Project Planning
- Creating an Outreach Plan/ Getting the Word Out
- Fundraising
- Relating to the Media and Telling Your Story
- Door-Knocking (eg. your neighbors)
- Basic Data Management, Website Building, and more
- How Home Energy Systems Work
- Home Weatherization and Basic Do-It-Yourself Home Energy Upgrades
- How to Teach Home Weatherization Techniques
- How the Electricity and Natural Gas Systems Work
- Understanding Your Energy Bill (and why it is that way)
- Current Minnesota Energy Policy and Regulations
- Established and Reliable Clean Energy Technology
- And more!

Informational Resources:
Below is a list of some of the main places where you can get more information:

- For lots of action ideas with estimates of savings and a platform for tracking your progress, visit the MN Energy Challenge: http://www.mnenergychallenge.org/
- More resources on home energy programs and home energy financing can be found at http://thenec.org/
- A search tool for finding home energy financing in your neighborhood can be accessed at http://www.mncee.org/What-We-Do/Financing/
- For more action ideas, check out the Hennepin County Environmental Education Toolkits: http://www.hennepin.us/portal/site/HennepinUS/menuitem.b1ab75471750e40fa01dfb47ccf06498/?vgnextoid=7025f2d94d85b210VgnVCM2000000a124689RCRD
- For more resources on energy, visit the MN Department of Commerce Site: www.energy.mn.gov
- For energy efficiency finance info, check out the MN Housing Finance Agency's Home Improvement Loans: http://www.mnhousing.gov/consumers/home-owners/HomeImprovementLoans/index.aspx
- More rebates, financing programs, and other financing information can be found at The Database of State Incentives for Renewables & Efficiency website: www.dsireusa.org

OUR POWER

Appendix: What Challenges Are We Facing Around Energy?

Our current energy system is at the center of a broad range of problems that threaten our lifestyles, our communities, our economy, and our planet. Here's a brief introduction to some of the biggest challenges that energy issues pose to South Minneapolis:

Energy Poverty and Dependency: The average American family spends 5% of their annual income to pay for energy (not counting gas for transportation). The average family below the poverty line spends 15%, which is a major burden on families already struggling to make ends meet. Most families are dependent on these expensive dirty energy sources for their basic needs such as heat, light, hot water, cooking, and transportation, yet have little ability to reduce their dependency. For many, rising energy costs force difficult choices between heat, food, and transportation. Since fossil fuel energy is jobs-poor (revenue is spent primarily on resource extraction and machinery rather than jobs) and are located far outside of the neighborhood, this energy dependency also forces dollars to flow out of the local community. You can learn more about the problem of energy poverty here: http://www.nliec.org/cold.pdf

Pollution and Health Hazards: Burning coal, oil, natural gas, and gasoline causes a large portion of overall air pollution. Petroleum-based chemicals are also the central components and/or fuel sources for chemical manufacturing that creates in-door and out-door air pollution. According to a 2004 Environmental Protection Agency study, power plants, particularly coal-fired ones, cause almost 24,000 premature deaths each year (the average shortening of life span due to these plants is 14 years) across the country. Additionally, this pollution is responsible for over 38,000 non-fatal heart attacks and 554,000 asthma attacks each year nationwide. While Minneapolis is far from the worst (A Sierra Club database estimates 18 premature deaths and 351 asthma attacks caused by coal power each year for Hennepin County), asthma and air pollution significant impact our community, especially among East African residents. You can read more about the linkage between pollution from dirty energy facilities and health impacts here: http://www.americanprogress.org/issues/2011/05/asthma_day.html

Blackouts and Power Surges: As demand for electricity continues to rise, our grid faces blackouts. Blackouts happen when local electricity capacity cannot meet what is being used. Another problem – power surges – occur when the voltage jumps suddenly, damaging electrical equipment. Because most energy users do not have any incentive to save energy at peak use times, poor power quality continues to be a problem. These problems are costing South Minneapolis businesses and institutions hundreds of thousands of dollars annually. In addition, the aging local electrical infrastructure in the area faces frequent failures, causing local blackouts that are a nuisance in the neighborhood. You can learn more about various power quality problems at this industry article or a broader sense of what is wrong with our electrical grid here.

Negative Impacts of Energy Extraction and Infrastructure: Within our neighborhood, energy infrastructure includes underground natural gas and oil pipelines, boilers and furnaces in homes and buildings, gas stations, and electrical transmission lines, substations, and local powerlines. The most common negative local impacts are aesthetic and economic. Above-ground pipelines, transmission lines and substations are widely known to depress property values and reduce economic development in surrounding urban areas. There are also concerns about health impacts

from electromagnetic fields around high-voltage power lines, as evidenced in the recent Xcel Hiawatha Transmission Line hearings. These types of infrastructure also raise questions of local control – the routing of these facilities is often decided with little opportunity for meaningful input from the residents and businesses most affected. In the 1980s, a similar struggle in Western Minnesota helped ignite community action around energy issues and launched the late Senator Paul Wellstone's career. Local natural gas infrastructure also occasionally creates catastrophic accidents, such as the pipeline explosion near the Crosstown and 35W in March 2011.

The biggest negative impacts of dirty energy infrastructure are at the other end of the line, where our energy is extracted and produced – here are a few of the impacts of our energy sources:

- Mountaintop removal mining in Appalachia; which blasts the top off mountains to access coal seams underneath and fills valleys with coal refuse and poisoning communities with toxic coal sludge. While Xcel Energy's local coal plants do not use mountain-top removal coal mining directly, they do buy coal from companies that operate these mines (see the connection here). Learn more about mountaintop removal here. Most Minnesota coal comes from strip mines in the grasslands of the Dakotas and Wyoming.
- Nuclear dry cask storage at Prairie Island; Xcel Energy committed to a dramatic increase in renewable energy in order to store their nuclear waste next to a reservation, but the tribe continues to cite of ongoing health issues and disregard for tribal sovereignty.
- Tar sands mining in Alberta; which is devastating millions of acres of tribal lands and breeding grounds for migratory birds to refine oily sludge into usable oil. The Keystone XL pipeline would have opened the flow of Canadian tar sands from Canada to refining and export facilities in Texas, but tar sands oil continues to supply the Upper Midwest. This is one of the most polluting, wasteful, and expensive sources of energy. Read more about the basics here and take a deeper dive here.
- Hydraulic fracturing (also known as fracking) is a new method of accessing natural gas by pumping water, diesel, and other chemicals into loose rock formations to break the rock and release natural gas. This technique has become common within the last ten years and is now widely practiced in areas of the Great Plains, Southwest, and Ohio, Pennsylvannia, and Western New York. This technique is responsible for extreme water pollution (many cases of water in home sinks catching on fire have been documented) and seismic activity. To learn more, review the series of "Drilling Down" articles published by the New York Times.
- Manitoba Hydropower is a large electricity producer in Canada that supplies electricity to Xcel Energy in Minnesota and elsewhere by running a series of massive hydroelectric dams. These dams are flooding larger regions of the boreal forests and eroding the local economy for local Cree peoples. Learn more from an interview on Living On Earth in 2000 or this direct report on the environmental justice impacts.

Energy Centralization and Monopoly: Along with transportation fuel, energy makes up almost 10% of the entire economy, but it is controlled by a handful of giant companies with little room for competition. Large scale energy production and distribution technology costs billions of dollars upfront (an average power plant costs $0.5-$3 billion, and transmission lines cost over $1 million per mile), so few local or start-up companies have access to the market. The growth of renewable energy and energy efficiency means that smaller localized energy ventures can compete economically and technologically. However, a complex range of archaic federal and state laws have entrenched the monopoly system of one energy provider per region. In Our

Power's seven neighborhood area, this means that the $63+ million dollars we spend each year on energy that is going to less then 10 companies (Xcel, Centerpoint, and the different gasoline companies in our neighborhood, with over half just to Xcel and Centerpoint alone). Most of these energy dollars leave our neighborhood, with few opportunities for competition that would create a cleaner energy system. You can read more about the barriers that this monopoly system creates here (focused on electricity, also generally applies to heating fuel and gasoline). Also check out their recommendations for central principles for a democratic electrical system.

Global Energy Depletion and Rising Energy Prices: As the 1970's energy crises and the 2008 spike in energy prices (linked with global food riots and food prices and the 2008 financial collapse) demonstrated, volatile energy prices wreak havoc with our lives, communities, and economies. Energy prices have risen dramatically over the past few years, and many researchers believe that we have recently passed global peak oil (with peak natural gas and peak coal nearing). This period will be followed by periodically rising prices (volatility and rapid short-term swings up and down will still occur) and the search for new energy sources. The depletion of easily accessible energy is driving the push for costly and damaging energy sources that harm human health and the environment. As available reserves of fossil energy are exhausted, rising prices will continue to weaken our economy, prolonging economic stagnation, energy insecurity, and energy poverty until we move beyond dirty energy. For more information about peak energy and how it will affect the economy, visit http://www.energybulletin.net/primer.php. For information on how coal – often touted as a limitless energy source is also depleting, visit http://europe.theoildrum.com/node/2726/

Global Conflict and Energy: Global resources of oil and gas, the fuels most easily used for heating and transportation, are concentrated in the Middle East and the Caspian Sea (about 2/3 of all global oil reserves are in these areas). Fueled by high global demand for oil, political and military conflict has been rampant in these areas as well as in other oil producing regions like Venezuela, Nigeria, Sudan and Bolivia. The United States' interest in safe-guarding global energy production has drawn it into several of these international conflicts, including recently in Kuwait, Iraq, and Libya (while Afghanistan is not a major oil producing country, the roots of the conflict there also stem from regional unrest around American presence in the Middle East). Other recent conflicts featuring energy resources include the showdown between Russia and the neighboring nation of Georgia around a pipeline from the Caspian region, the current tensions between Southeast Asian Nations with American support and China around the South China Sea, as well as the financing of state-sponsored genocide in Darfur and Southern Sudan from oil purchases. Read more about the linkage between dependency on dirty energy, especially oil and natural gas, and conflict here.

Global Climate Crisis: As coal, oil, and natural gas are burned for personal use or in the production of food or products, they release gasses into the atmosphere that are dramatically changing the global climate. "Greenhouse" gasses like carbon dioxide and methane trap heat from the sun. These gasses have maintained a regular cycle between Ice Ages for millions of years (concentrations of greenhouse gasses varied between 200 parts per million (ppm) of the atmosphere during ice ages to around 300 ppm during warmer inter-glacial periods like the one in which human agriculture was founded). However, since the start of the Industrial Revolution, greenhouse gasses have been climbing rapidly, and are now over 390 ppm, a level not seen for

many millions of years and well in excess of what scientists consider to be safe for our planet (350 ppm). This means rising global average temperatures and changing weather systems (drought, powerful storms, floods, abundance of insects and pests, ocean currents) world-wide.

Ordinary people all around the world are suffering from the effects of this climate disruption. Some of the most prominent changes are:

- Average temperatures are warming and that there are a much greater number of heat waves and extreme high temperatures – several have happened in Minnesota in recent years.
- Disrupted rainfall patterns, often with longer droughts and intense but irregular heavy rainfall. Droughts have already been affecting food production world-wide, including low crop yields across Minnesota. Catastrophic rain events are also becoming more common. When high precipitation occurs at low enough temperatures, this means heavier snowfall, so higher than normal snowfalls during winters (with slightly warmer temperatures) are consistent with the predictions.
- More unpredictable and violent storms, including hurricanes and tornado-producing storms. The number of tornadoes and the number of hurricanes, particularly severe hurricanes, has dramatically increased in the past decade. Residents of North Minneapolis recently affected by the 2011 tornado as well as people across the Gulf Coast and East Coast devastated by recent hurricanes may be examples of a new normal.
- Shifting habitats for many species, including trees, birds, fish, and pests. Conifer forests are expected to die out from northern Minnesota by the end of the century and hunters are already seeing duck populations shrink as the prairie potholes they live in dry up (moose are also being affected by formerly rare diseases). Birds are migrating at different times of year, and the insects they eat are emerging at different times. Globally, disease carrying ticks and mosquitoes and crop and tree destroying pests are increasingly abundant further from the tropics and at higher elevations.
- Shrinking sea ice and melting polar and mountain glaciers worldwide – this raises sea level, destabilizes land-based ice sheets that could raise the sea level by many feet if they collapsed, and threatens the water supply for the 40% of the world's people whose water is supplied by glacier-fed rivers. Additionally, melting alters oceanic currents that sustain critical fish populations, transfer heat from the tropics, and moderate global weather.

The impacts observed so far (which have occurred far faster than scientists originally expected) have been created by less than half the greenhouse gas emissions we have already released. It is already tripping dangerous cycles where the world's ecosystems absorb more heat and release more warming gasses such as melting methane-rich Arctic tundra, exposing dark polar waters, and increasing carbon-releasing forest fires. As we continue to use carbon-based sources of energy, we are pushing the changes our society will have to adapt to a far greater level than what we have yet witnessed – potentially to the breaking point.

For more information, visit http://www.cleanair-coolplanet.org/information/
For a much more detailed and technical explanation of the problem and its impacts, visit the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change Fourth Assessment published in 2007, the complete resource on the subject: http://www.ipcc.ch/publications_and_data/ar4/syr/en/contents.html