



# Best Practices Guide

## 2018



## ***The Smart Energy Consumer Collaborative's Best Practices Awards***

*were developed to recognize leadership from energy providers (including investor-owned utilities, public power utilities and retail electricity providers) in the shift toward a more consumer-focused, consumer-friendly energy ecosystem.*

*As successors to the CLEAR Awards, which were awarded to three recipients from 2013-2017, the new Best Practices Awards program focuses on real-life examples of customer engagement and education success and provides a blueprint for other electricity providers (and their industry partners) to follow. By focusing on applicable insights, thought leadership and product innovation, it is our hope that these awards spark real and considerable change within the utility industry.*

*The five winners of the inaugural Best Practices Awards were honored during the 2018 Consumer Symposium on Monday, January 22 at DistribuTECH in San Antonio, Texas. A webinar featuring the winners will be conducted in February 2018, and complete case studies on the winning program will be added to the Customer Engagement Success Stories Library throughout 2018.*



## Smart Energy Innovation

*An organization that has developed an innovative product, tool or technology to increase consumer energy engagement of broad industry and/or societal benefit.*

Ameren Illinois is planning for the grid of the future through its new distributed energy resource facility in Champaign-Urbana, Illinois. The \$5 million microgrid was completed in December 2016 and tested in the first quarter of 2017. The first-of-its-kind facility has allowed Ameren Illinois to test new products and services that could possibly be rolled out to its 1.2 million electric customers across the state.

The Ameren Illinois microgrid is the most technologically advanced utility-scale microgrid in North America. The facility's local generation (a solar array, wind turbine and two natural gas units) can be stored in the microgrid's battery, routed to the central grid or even delivered to local customers -- another first for a U.S. utility. Although it's a testing facility, the microgrid also has the capability to deliver more than 1 MW to actual Ameren Illinois customers without experiencing an outage. In fact, the facility is already powering nearly 200 homes in businesses in the area.

The innovative microgrid developed by Ameren Illinois demonstrates the potential for wide-scale DER integration within an existing distribution network. As distributed generation continues to proliferate in the coming years, Ameren Illinois has established itself as a partner that can help its customers safely and cost-effectively install and utilize these new technologies. The microgrid provides a glimpse at an energy future where consumers are more empowered than ever before.

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### HONORABLE MENTION:

**National Grid**



# Culture Transformation

*An organization that takes three or more specific actions to reorient its company culture toward a more customer-focused operation.*

Since 2012, CenterPoint Energy has embarked on a transformative journey to instill and nurture a customer-centric culture across its enterprise. The transition from an engineering and reliability focus to one centered on customers marked a significant change in CenterPoint's company culture, and this organizational change has been driven by a common focus on the quality of the daily experiences that customers have with the distribution system and the impact of those experiences on their lives.

To instill its customer-centric culture, CenterPoint Energy took several pivotal steps. First was making sure they have the right people in place internally. A chief customer officer was appointed to own the complete customer experience across the enterprise. CenterPoint also created new positions for ETR coordinators, who were co-located with dispatchers and ensured timely outage reporting and restoration information to customers, and customer lifecycle managers, who developed engaging "moments that matter" with customers and identified further opportunities to deepen the customer relationship.

CenterPoint also undertook new methods on listening to and measuring their customers' voices. Having formerly used reliability metrics as proxies of customer experience, the company now uses direct customer feedback through surveys to develop a customer satisfaction composite index score, the performance of which accounts for ten percent of all employees' annual short-term incentive compensation. Finally, CenterPoint has developed new programs, like the Power Alert Service, Preference Center and soon-to-be-released electric customer account portal, which allow customers the ability to proactively receive pertinent information about their electricity usage when and where they need it.

Moving from an engineering measure to direct customer feedback and digital engagement enabled by smart energy infrastructure has allowed CenterPoint Energy to more actively prioritize projects based on the quality of expected customer outcomes and experience. As a result of this cultural transformation, CenterPoint has been consistently recognized as a leader in the customer space, earning the highest Engaged Customer Relationship, Brand Trust, Product Experience and Service Satisfaction ratings in Texas.

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## HONORABLE MENTION:

**CPS Energy**



# Colorado Springs Utilities

*It's how we're all connected*

## Consumer Engagement

*An organization that achieved adoption of or engagement with a smart energy technology, program or behavior by an exceptional number of consumers.*

As a four-service municipal utility, Colorado Springs Utilities has a deep responsibility to provide its customers with information to use its services safely and efficiently. To meet this obligation, the utility introduced a new, comprehensive customer engagement initiative, Change the Current, in March 2017. The innovative program encourages customers to pledge to make small changes in their use of utilities with the primary objective of bettering the community.

Along with this initiative, Colorado Springs Utilities set a considerable challenge for itself: meet operational goals and maintain (or improve) customer satisfaction – with the lowest communications budget in 15 years. The specific goals of the Change the Current initiative were twofold. First, the utility aimed to reach 5,700 customer pledges by the end of 2017. Second, they sought to improve its J.D. Power Residential Electric Customers Satisfaction Study communications index (comparing the pre-launch study to the post-launch study).

To achieve these goals, Colorado Springs Utilities developed a new interactive website, [changethecurrent.com](http://changethecurrent.com), and worked with a local creative team to develop videos to show how local customers are “changing the current”. The website housed all of the creative developed for the initiative and served as a customer engagement tool, providing both residential and business customers with tips to save money by using less electricity (or water). By signing the pledge on the website, customers also received free LED light bulbs, which helped the utility with demand-side management goals. The website also has quick links to discounts or other rebates that customers may be able to access.

The launch of the Change the Current program has already been a success within the Colorado Springs community. Colorado Springs Utilities reached 100 percent of its annual pledge six weeks early, and all five of the communications scores improved following the launch.

### HONORABLE MENTIONS:

**San Diego Gas & Electric**  
**Central Hudson Gas & Electric**



# Underserved Markets

*An organization that has achieved adoption of or engagement with a smart energy technology, program or behavior within or to the benefit of an underserved segment of consumers.*

Nearly 50 million people in the U.S. today cannot afford to pay for their energy bills. Yet, at the same time, individual participation in existing Bill and Energy Assistance Programs is typically very low, especially among millennial and Generation X utility customers. These younger customers are accustomed to making charitable donations online, where they can see exactly where their money is going and where they can learn about the needs of their communities.

To better engage younger consumers in Bill and Energy Assistance Programs, Direct Energy transformed its existing Neighbor-to-Neighbor program (N2N) into an engaging, gamified digital array of offerings, including:

The Smart Giving Program leverages smart grid-related technologies, such as the smart thermostat, and empowers individuals with the ability to automatically save and donate energy. Users can adjust the temperature of the thermostat icon, see an approximation of the bill savings and donate it directly to the N2N program.

The ability for admin users to create campaigns and inform their customers about the needs of the local community. In September 2017, Direct Energy and CPL Retail Energy launched a Hurricane Harvey relief campaign and matched \$50,000 in donations to the American Red Cross. The community engagement was phenomenal, and the visitor-to-donor engagement was higher than 10 percent.

The Save and Donate Program empowers individuals with the ability to learn how they can save the amount of their donations by following energy-saving tips. This program engages millennials and Generation X customers with smart gamification that also protects the environment.

By using technology that appeals to younger consumers, Direct Energy has developed a next-generation solution for alleviating energy poverty. Launched only in the second half of 2017, the program has already been successful in its use among individual donors and the contributions back to the community.

## HONORABLE MENTION:

**Fort Collins Utilities**



An Exelon Company

powering lives

## Consumer Education

*An organization that sponsored or authored a communication and/or education campaign aimed at consumers on a subject related to smart energy engagement.*

There are many reasons why consumers may not engage in energy efficiency at home, but mostly it drills down to a lack of time and education. Consumers are busy with other areas of their lives, and energy efficiency is not usually top of mind. Further, some consumers might mistakenly believe that they've done all they can or even that they can't meaningfully change their home energy use without losing comfort or control.

To combat these barriers, ComEd developed a creative educational campaign aimed at helping consumers understand the benefits of smart thermostats, the availability of energy efficiency rebates and other ways they can save.

The basis of the campaign was talking, animated outlets, refrigerators and thermostats. These household items know quite a bit about electricity, so why not let them educate consumers? ComEd developed CGI characters based around these appliances to discuss key topics in energy efficiency, and utilizing this strategy, many customers actually listened for the first time. Once customers were engaged, ComEd provided an online video with more information, and this "one-two punch" allowed them to initiate a deeper, more meaningful conversation about energy efficiency.

ComEd also successfully used market segmentation in their campaign. They targeted consumers that believe that everyone has an obligation to be environmentally responsible and also the "Evening Peakers", a group whose energy usage spikes significantly in the evenings and who would benefit considerably from a smart thermostat. Another key part of the educational initiative was the 60-second "Hot Dog/ Cool Cat" video that was shown with the trailers in local theaters. This brief video educates consumers on the benefits of a smart thermostat and how it's "so easy to use, even a kitty can do it."

The campaign has been a success in educating consumers about smart thermostats and the various energy efficiency rebates that are already available to them. ComEd has achieved 4.6 million viewing impressions, resulting in more than 53,600 rebates at a value of nearly \$3 million, which represents a 180-percent growth over 2015.

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### HONORABLE MENTION:

**Oklahoma Gas & Electric**

*The Smart Energy Consumer Collaborative is proud to recognize these five energy providers as the inaugural Best Practices Award winners.*

*Selected by an advisory panel of 13 industry experts, each winner exemplifies exceptional customer-centric programs and strategies that collectively create a more positive experience with energy for consumers. Nominations for the 2019 Best Practices Awards will open during the summer of 2018 at [www.smartenergycc.org](http://www.smartenergycc.org).*



**Working for a consumer-friendly, consumer-safe smart grid**

SECC's mission is to serve as a trusted source of information for industry stakeholders seeking a broad understanding of consumers' views about grid modernization, electricity delivery and energy usage, and for consumers seeking an understanding of the value and experience of a modern grid.

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