

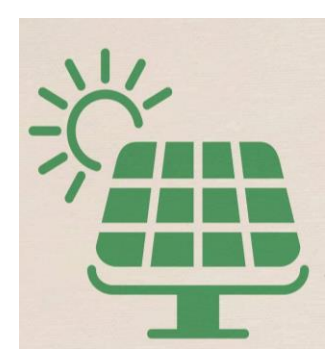


# EOS Eco-Energy & Aster Group

## Energy Poverty Survey Results

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## Introduction

For people who can afford energy-efficient upgrades and add renewables, it can be a challenge, but what about people on low incomes who can't afford these upgrades?

Improving energy efficiency and renewable upgrades for low-income people can go a long way to reduce their energy costs and create conditions for being closer to a livable wage. With funding from the NB Environmental Trust Fund, EOS Eco-Energy decided to interview some key community players in the Tantramar region. We would like to thank Kyla Wilkinson for her help with the interviews.

## Survey

Ten surveys were sent to the following people (see table below). Some of the interviews were in person, and some were by e-mail. The people interviewed represent organizations with many people.

Ten surveys were sent to the people in the table below. The people represent organizations with large groups of people. Some of the interviews were in person, and some were by e-mail.

Organization	Person contacted
PEDVAC Foundation	Katie Towers
Belong to various community organizations	Eric & Margaret Tusz-King
Active community member	Alice Cotton
Local MLA	Megan Mitton
Open Sky Co-op	Laura Hunter
Daybreak	Melody Petlock
NB Conservation Council	Louise Comeau
Sackville Food Bank	Heather Patterson

<b>Organization</b>	<b>Person contacted</b>
Active community member	Tracy Wade
Dorchester Moving Forward	Wendy Keats

### **Sample Survey**

1. How are low-income people struggling to pay energy costs? Are they heating their homes less, to pay for food and rent?
2. Are they aware of energy efficiencies and renewable technologies? Are they aware of NB Power grants for low-income people?
3. What do you see as the main barriers for low-income people to adopt renewables?  
Money, knowledge, trust
4. What recommendations do you have to implement an energy efficient and a renewable upgrades program for low-income people?
5. Any other additional comments are welcome.

Thanks for your time!

### **Results**

A summary of how many people responded can be found below. Eight responses were received from out of eleven people contacted. Repeated attempts to contact the remaining three failed, probably because at least two of the three individuals had time constraints. One of the people contacted felt they couldn't speak for those receiving their services.

<b>Organization</b>	<b>Responds received</b>
PEDVAC Foundation	Yes

<b>Organization</b>	<b>Responds received</b>
Various community organizations	4 responses
Local MLA	Yes
Open Sky Co-op	Yes
Daybreak	No response, very busy person
NB Conservation Council	Tried 2 different e-mails no response
Sackville Food Bank	Felt they could not respond on behalf of the clients
Dorchester Moving Forward	Yes

A summary of the responses can be found below. All the surveys can be found in the appendix.

### **How are low-income people struggling to pay energy costs? Are they heating their homes less to pay for food and rent?**

Here is what we found:

- Residents are cutting back on their heating to the point of discomfort and sometimes health.
- People are going more to food banks and trying to avoid purchasing medications and attending medical/dental/eye appointments. Overall, stats recently showed that Food Bank use is up 79% (Food Banks Canada, 2023).
- Incomes are too low to apply for energy upgrades.
- Heating rebates are too low.
- Food & rent are the priority.

### **Are they aware of energy efficiencies and renewable technologies? Are they aware of NB Power grants for low-income people?**

Generally, not, we found:

- Tenants will not complain about their heating until the situation is critical because they don't want their landlord to be upset with them.
- Even though some low-income people own their own homes, they think energy-efficiency technology is for the wealthy. They generally do not know how to acquire the subsidies/grants/loans that are sometimes available to them.
- People are concerned there is "too much red tape."
- There is a feeling of hopelessness.
- When they do know and try to access the grants, they often run into long delay periods or get lost in the process of applying for the energy audit, its recommendations for energy conservation/efficiency, and how they will accommodate the technology in their small, poorly built house.

**These are what we found are the main barriers for low-income people to adopt renewables:**

- Lack of knowledge of the simple technology available for renovations,
- Federal and provincial grants change constantly,
- Not enough installers, especially with changing grants,
- Participants in energy programs are required to provide cash up front, which is often too high for medium to lower-income people,
- Difficulties with using the web,
- Hard to make money decisions,
- Literacy challenges,
- No agency over their place, i.e. Have no say how their apartment is heating,
- Lack of trust in government officials,
- Lack of money for the upfront payment for the technology,
- Lack of knowledge about the value of investing in renewables and the benefits for themselves and society.

**We had many recommendations on how to implement an energy-efficient and a renewable upgrades program for low-income people. Here they are:**

- The solar program initiated in Halifax Regional Municipalities is a great example of what can be done in NB.
- There is a need to develop a 10-year commitment on incentive programs,
- The greatest influence on people installing solar panels is for homeowners to see it on their neighbour's homes. I suspect that if the same psychology were applied to mini-splits, energy audits and energy efficiency upgrades, it would make a difference.
- EOS could do more collaborative projects with other social and community-based development organizations to spread the uptake.
- Energy poverty is linked to many societal issues - the need for living wages, better social programs, cycles of poverty that can be hard to break, education levels, literacy levels, etc. All of things need to be considered.
- More services offered on the phone to help people navigate the information.
- Videos are useful to show how simple renovations can be done.
- Demonstrative hands-on activities can be helpful.
- Some people would benefit from site home visits.
- Consideration for subsidizing a larger portion of heating costs,
- Free heat pumps and-or solar panels would go a long way, but apartment owners should not use them if it provides an excuse to increase rent.
- A better program for coops and non-profits would also help.
- Provide funding to community organizations to cover staffing and all the supplies, then set up programs that connect with lower-income homeowners, like EOS has done.
- Lower the income requirement for applying for grants.
- Make it easily accessible and have assistance to go through the steps.
- A coaching program, someone who has done it already to assist with questions.

- An education program about the cost savings associated with renewables in the short and long term (realistic estimates of upfront costs and long-term payback) – while this education program can touch on the ‘public good’ side of renewables and efficiency, the focus must be on cost savings.
- A support system to help those who want to take the plunge navigate through bureaucracy and red tape.
- Case studies to showcase success stories (individual stories about their experience in making the decision, making the changes, and what the impact is on their monthly/annual budget).

### **Conclusions**

Although the sample size was small, the results were clear. For low to medium-income renewables, it is not really on their minds. Several reasons can explain this:

- Their income level is too low to apply for grants.
- They don’t necessarily have access to a computer and the internet.
- They don’t trust government officials.
- They have immediate concerns, such as paying their rent and food bills.
- They are challenged with reading and writing.
- They find the application process too complicated.
- The wait lists are too long.
- They can’t keep up with the changing and inconsistent granting programs.

According to a report prepared by Sustainable Building Canada, a non-profit organization, in 2023 found similar results to our survey.

1. Energy retrofit programs targeting low-income families rely on household incomes to determine those in need of retrofits. However, they overlook other important factors like household composition, gender, tenure, immigration status, and educational background. Integrating these determinants can help create more equitable outcomes.

2. Grants are often too narrow in scope, lack funding and there is insufficient cooperation at different government levels.
3. Many retrofitting programs are designed by institutions that focus on energy-saving targets and cost-effective outcomes.
4. Other barriers are often ignored, such as, the high up-front investments and financial constraints that restrict people's ability to retrofit their homes. They are also often left with few options to access affordable housing and in addition, have little control over their living space.

### **Moving Forward**

All the people interviewed produced excellent suggestions to address these issues, such as more consistent long-term funding and intergovernmental cooperation.

- Make use of non-profit groups to carry out these programs, like EOS draft-proof working parties, and help people navigate funding applications.
- Engage medium to low-income people who have gone through the programs to help non-profits provide useful assistance.
- Use lawn signage to show the homeowner has received energy-efficient upgrades.
- Carry out hands-on workshops with community groups, including instructional videos on how to do similar energy upgrades.
- Lower the income requirement for applying for grants.
- Encourage community members to be advocates for energy upgrade programs in their own communities.
- Provide a living wage.
- Initiate a solar insulation program like [Halifax Regional Municipalities](#).

While current energy retrofit programs have been essential for many families to upgrade their homes, these programs often fail to address the energy needs of low to medium-income people. Adopting some of the above measures will go a long way to provide energy equity.

## Works Cited

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