



# Helping Consumers Understand DOE's Home Energy Rebates Programs: Recommendations for State Webpages

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The U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) Home Energy Rebates programs are of great interest to consumers, and that interest will only grow as the programs get closer to launching. Especially because states will be responsible for administering these programs, it is important for them to provide their residents with clear, easily accessible, consumer-friendly information. Even though the programs may not launch for many months, it is desirable for states to get a webpage up quickly to help prepare consumers and to ensure they don't take actions based on inaccurate expectations.

Few consumers are energy experts, and most have no direct experience with rebates, clean energy appliances, and whole-home retrofits. Nevertheless, to take advantage of the Home Energy Rebates programs, they will need to navigate these complicated programs and make sense of the many other tax credits, rebates, and discounts for home improvements, including the different income and geographic eligibility rules for each incentive. To ensure that they can make decisions appropriate for their needs, they need tailored information that they can access in one location, informing them about these programs and the other state, regional, and local incentives they may be eligible for.

This guide explains what information states should provide consumers on a state Home Energy Rebates webpage and highlights existing information by DOE, states, and other entities that provide models and useful resource information.

## 1. Explaining the Rebates

Even before states launch their Homeowner Managing Energy Savings (HOMES) and High-Efficiency Electric Home Rebate (HEEHR) programs, they should provide interested consumers with a "one-stop-shop" webpage to educate and prepare them. We recommend states include the following information on their webpages to ensure consumers adequately understand the programs and know whether those programs can or cannot meet the consumer's individual needs.

## A. A Concise Explanation of HOMES/HEEHR

The webpage should include the following:

- An explanation of where HOMES/HEEHR money comes from
- Examples of whole-home energy efficiency upgrades and a list of appliances eligible for rebates under these programs
- What the income limits are
- How long the program is authorized to last (but make clear that funding could run out sooner)
- How much money the state will receive for the programs
- An explanation of how and when consumers can receive rebates.

States should ensure that this information is one of the first things consumers see on the webpage and is easily readable and navigable.

## B. Information about Technologies and Home Energy Systems

In an easily accessible place on the webpage, states should provide a glossary where common terms, such as “induction stove,” “HVAC system,” “heat pump,” etc., are clearly defined. In addition, if states have the capacity, we recommend providing illustrations or videos of where different efficiency measures and electric appliances fit into the home system and how they work. While states can choose to create such illustrations or descriptions, they can instead directly link to preexisting sources for consumers to learn more. Additionally, states can also point consumers to existing content that provides explanations of why different efficiency measures and appliances are beneficial for the climate, consumers’ health, and consumers’ energy bills. Here are a few resources with useful descriptions of common appliances and retrofits eligible for rebates, how they work, and benefits to consumers and the environment:

- DOE’s [“Home Comfort” webpage](#) provides explanations and diagrams of appliances, weatherization, home heating and cooling systems, and more
- The [White House’s clean energy webpage](#) offers visual and descriptive diagrams of appliances and home energy systems, e.g., heat pumps, electric stoves/ovens, clothes dryers, etc. that are digestible for consumers
- Rewiring America offers the public several good descriptions of common appliances, how they work, and benefits to consumers and the environment (e.g., [heat pump air conditioners/heaters](#), [weatherization](#), [electric/induction stoves](#), etc.)
- The Efficiency Maine Trust, the independent, quasi-state agency established to plan and implement energy efficiency programs in Maine, has an excellent [residential incentives and rebates webpage](#) with consumer-friendly descriptions and examples of upgrades such as heat pumps, water heaters, weatherization, etc.

## C. Answers to FAQs

A state's rebates webpage should include a robust Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) page that attempts to address as many common consumer questions as possible. It's fine to be repetitive, including information highlighted in subsection B above—this helps ensure that consumers have opportunities to run across relevant information for these programs in several places. To make it easy to develop a state's webpage, the FAQs page can be based in large part on DOE's [FAQs page](#) for these programs, as many answers to consumers' questions will be identical to those. While it is not essential, we recommend webpages sort FAQs by topic or make them searchable, so that consumers can more easily find an answer to their particular question. FAQs should be updated regularly, including when new information is available or in response to a common question that the FAQs section does not already address.

## 2. Avoiding Unrealistic Expectations

States should ensure that they avoid giving consumers unrealistic expectations around when funding will be available and how much. This is one of the most important pieces of information states can provide consumers about these rebates, other than information about what the rebates are and consumers' eligibility.

The webpage should include, in a prominent place, a realistic timeline for program implementation. Specifically, it should explain when the state expects rebates to be available and note that this date is subject to change. The more transparency a state can provide, the better. If this information changes, the state should update the timeline on the webpage so that consumers can stay informed. We also recommend states include an opportunity on the webpage for consumers to sign up for email alerts by providing their email address so they can know as soon as new information becomes available.

Additionally, a state's rebate webpage should set accurate consumer expectations around DOE's recently released decision about retroactivity and the home energy rebates. For context, on October 13, 2023, DOE updated its [Program Requirements & Application Instructions](#) document to clarify that retroactivity is allowed for HOMES rebates [p. 10 (3.1.2)]. Retroactive rebates are not allowed for HEEHR. For HOMES, states now "must" provide a pathway for homeowners who wish to apply for retroactive rebates. States should make this information clear to consumers on their webpage, and under what circumstances their particular state is planning to provide a pathway for homeowners who wish to retroactively apply for HOMES rebates.

## 3. Sample Webpages

The following HOMES/HEEHR program webpages developed by states provide excellent models of many of the webpage elements recommended above:

- California Energy Commission (CEC): [The CEC rebates webpage](#) provides consumers with an excellent FAQs page. Additionally, the webpage explains the rebates, where they come from, rough estimates/timelines as to when they will become available, and includes an option for consumers to sign up for email updates and a contact email for questions.
- Washington State Department of Commerce: [Washington's rebates webpage](#) also includes a FAQs section, an explanation of the rebates and their legislative origins, a link to subscribe to the department's rebates mailing list, contact information for these programs, and rough estimates of timelines as to when they will become available.
- South Carolina's Energy Office: [South Carolina's Home Energy Rebates webpage](#) sets consumers' expectations at the outset by displaying, in large font at the top of the webpage, a statement that rebates are currently not yet available. It too includes an explanation of the rebates and their legislative origins and FAQs.

## 4. Savings Calculator

Once a state launches its HOMES/HEEHR programs and funding is ready for consumers, a state should ideally deploy a one-stop-shop savings calculator, i.e., an interactive tool where a consumer can input minimal personal information and receive a list of rebates/incentives they may be eligible for. The tool should include homeowners, renters, and building owners, and it should include a disclaimer that it is only providing an *estimate* of savings.

In addition to highlighting the HOMES/HEEHR rebates that a consumer is/is not eligible for, the tool can provide guidance on other incentives the consumer is eligible for, be they federal [e.g., [federal tax credits](#), Weatherization Assistance Program ([WAP](#)), the Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program ([LIHEAP](#)), [state, local, and utility programs](#), regional incentives, etc.]. We recommend a state take one of four options in designing such a tool.

*Option 1:* if a state expects consumers in its state to only have access to HOMES/HEEHR rebates and other federal incentives (because there are not any state, local, or utility incentives), we recommend pointing consumers to Rewiring America's [incentive calculator](#) (which includes HOMES/HEEHR as potential eligible rebates) as a one-stop-shop for determining a consumer's federal incentive eligibility.

For states that expect consumers in their state to have access to more than just federal incentives, we recommend taking one of three other options:

*Option 2:* states can take a "do-it-yourself" (DIY) approach to developing such a tool. Consider, for example, Connecticut's Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP), which has issued a Request for Proposals (RFP) for companies to develop such a "Calculator". The RFP asks potential contractors to weigh in on questions such as whether the proposed evaluation criteria and percentage allocations in the Calculator are appropriate, and whether respondents wish to propose an outreach/marketing campaign for

the Calculator, among other questions. Interested states can read DEEP's Notice of Opportunity for Written Comments [here](#) and access the draft RFP [here](#).

*Option 3:* states can use PaulosAnalysis's [Incentive Finder](#) as a reference to create their own DIY interactive tool, or they can hire and work with PaulosAnalysis to create an Incentive Finder for their residents. For context, the head of [PaulosAnalysis](#), Ben Paulos, is a Senior Research Associate with CESA who also provides consulting on energy policy, advocacy, communications, and research. PaulosAnalysis recently collaborated with East Bay Community Energy (EBCE) to create the Incentive Finder for EBCE, a web tool aiming to be as streamlined as possible in connecting shoppers to the incentives they are eligible for. The user enters their Zip code, household size, and income, and the Finder identifies the home and transportation measures they are specifically eligible for. This is especially useful for low-income households who are often eligible for higher incentive levels. A set of filters allows the user to narrow results down as they please, and each incentive links to the source with full details.

For states interested in contracting with PaulosAnalysis to develop their own version of the [Incentive Finder](#) tool for their state's consumers, PaulosAnalysis proposes two deliverables for states. First, their consultants would set up the site, conducting research to identify and add incentives specific to your state to their current database of state and federal incentives, including geo-located eligibility rules. PaulosAnalysis would create a site that meshes seamlessly with a state's webpage, using a state's graphics and branding, or work with a state's web managers to integrate PaulosAnalysis's data and search functionality into a state's site.

Second, PaulosAnalysis would maintain the site over time, keeping on top of program and policy changes, plus any changes a state makes to its marketing or branding, and ensuring software performance. A state would oversee promotion, integrating the Finder into their customer marketing activities. PaulosAnalysis would provide usage data that could help a state understand its customer base. For more information, email Ben Paulos at [ben@paulosanalysis.com](mailto:ben@paulosanalysis.com).

*Option 4:* states could potentially work with Rewiring America to develop a state-specific version of Rewiring's tool for consumers. Rewiring America is currently working directly with the Rhode Island Office of Energy Resources (OER) to develop such a Calculator with incentives and rebates specific to Rhode Island. OER expects to have the tool ready for launch in mid-December of 2023. This tool could be a good model for other states, and there may be opportunities for other states to collaborate in a similar fashion with Rewiring America going forward.

## 5. Helping Consumers Find and Use the Webpage

A few final additions can ensure that a state's rebates webpage is ready for effective consumer use:

- (1) States should rigorously test their web platforms to ensure that the webpage is secure and can handle a major increase in traffic when HOMES/HEEHR rebates become available.
- (2) The webpage should be given a title and initial content that makes it easy for consumers to find and that will come up in search engines if consumers search for variations of “StateName Home Energy Rebates” or “StateName Residential Energy Rebates and Incentives.”
- (3) The webpage should include a way for consumers to contact the state agency administering the rebates if they are confused about the rebate programs or have questions that are not answered on the webpage. This should definitely include an email address where they can direct their questions, but ideally also a phone number.
- (4) Where possible, information on a state’s rebates webpage should be translated into several languages that are used within the state.
- (5) States should undertake significant outreach when they launch the webpage, including by contacting relevant businesses and community organizations to ask them to promote the webpage to their members and contacts. States should also send the completed webpage link over to any energy-related organizations within the state, and ask them to link to the page, help promote it, etc. This might include clean energy or efficiency groups, local utilities, and so on. Having other groups help states to promote their page to their audiences will help get the information in front of appropriate audiences.
- (6) We recommend states make it convenient for consumers to share the webpage and information about HOMES/HEEHR rebates with their friends, family, and neighbors. This includes sharing the webpage on state agency social media channels, and also providing easily accessible social share links from the webpage itself to popular platforms (Facebook, Twitter/X, LinkedIn, etc.). Given that word-of-mouth and community-based trust are important predictors of the likelihood of success for such programs, making the sharing of these resources easy for consumers will help ensure these programs reach the community members who are in the best position to benefit from them but may not otherwise learn about them.