



News Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE — May 24, 2016

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New Energy Partnership to Sow the SEEDs of Opportunity for People in Low-Income Housing

The Housing Authority of the City of Austin (HACA) today (May 24) kicked off a new energy literacy initiative with representatives from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), the U.S. Department of Energy, and the U.S. Department of Education, as well as local utility organizations. SEED initiative stakeholders include Austin Energy, Austin Water, Texas Gas, Nest Labs, and Pecan Street Inc.

The STEM, Education, and Economic Development (SEED) initiative will explore how energy literacy impacts energy efficiency and economic development among public housing residents. The goal of the HACA initiative is to help residents save money through energy literacy education. Ten HACA properties are currently undergoing energy performance improvements.

“When our residents save money, they are able to move more quickly to self sufficiency, thus leaving space for the next family in need of housing assistance,” said HACA President and CEO Michael Gerber. “This is just the beginning of an initiative that we hope will not only encourage residents to take measures to decrease energy consumption, but also to eventually pursue careers in energy-related fields.”

Austin Energy and HACA have developed project charters that address energy literacy and energy efficiency improvements analysis. Austin Energy will provide energy literacy training for public housing residents to raise awareness about consuming and conserving energy, and analytical support to help HACA improve energy conservation. HACA residents also will have an opportunity to become designated Energy Ambassadors to help their neighbors save money and reduce utility expenses.

“The pilot projects we've identified will ensure that people in public housing can realize the benefits of basic energy literacy and advanced tools to help them save on their energy bills,” said Debbie Kimberly, vice president of Customer Energy Solutions at Austin Energy. “HACA provides us an opportunity to meet our affordability goal for low income Austinites.”

In 2015, HACA was awarded a \$13 million HUD-approved Energy Performance Contract grant that provides for basic energy efficiency improvements including energy-efficient windows, better insulation and central air conditioning at 10 of the agency’s public housing properties. All projects are expected to be complete this year.

“I’m thrilled that the Housing Authority of the City of Austin has joined the SEED initiative,” said Lourdes Castro Ramírez, Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary for HUD’s Office of Public and

Indian Housing. “HACA has a successful history of using affordable housing as a platform for improving the lives of residents. Through its longstanding efforts to bridge the digital divide and now through this initiative, HACA will continue to lead our industry with these types of programs.”

SEED is already being piloted in five cities nationwide: Cleveland, Denver, San Antonio, Tampa, and Washington, D.C. By 2018, the plan is to reach 20 cities. According to the U.S. Department of Energy, the hope is that SEED will take root nationwide, inspiring public housing residents to seek training for in-demand jobs in STEM - science, engineering, technology and mathematics.

About HACA: The Housing Authority of the City of Austin is a public agency whose mission is to cultivate sustainable affordable housing communities and partnerships that inspire self reliance, growth and optimism. For more information, visit www.hacanet.org, or find us on Twitter [@hacanet](https://twitter.com/hacanet).

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