

A Summit to Explore the Building Blocks of Energy Performance: Data, Data, Data

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The Minneapolis skyline. Photo credit: bradleyjohnson via Flickr

Finding ways to better share monthly aggregated energy data from utilities to building owners and operators is critical to understanding and improving building performance across our country. But it's easier said than done, requiring cooperation among local industry stakeholders including building owners, utilities, governments and advocacy groups. On Jan. 24, a group of these stakeholders from across Minnesota gathered in Minneapolis to discuss ways to improve the flow of building data in the state.

There are several structural constraints and obstacles that prevent utilities from providing actionable energy data to building owners. In many cases, utilities across the country do not have the incentive, technical infrastructure or staff resources in place to provide aggregate energy usage data to building owners. However, building owners already have market-established tools at their disposal, like the [Environmental Protection Agency's Portfolio Manager](#), into which users can enter data to track building performance. Additionally, utilities must meet rules and regulations of state public utility commissions, which can unintentionally create additional barriers to how utilities are able to share data. Many of these restrictions are related to privacy concerns associated with sharing individual tenant data.

Two weeks ago, USGBC joined with the [USGBC Minnesota Chapter](#) and staff from the [Institute for Market Transformation](#) to host a first-of-its-kind summit to bring experts together to address energy data issues. Stakeholders across the Minnesota building industry gathered at the [Wells Fargo Center](#) in downtown Minneapolis to discuss the barriers and explore solutions for improving access to aggregated energy building data. Access to this critical data will empower building owners to make smarter energy decisions and better enable benchmarking of public and commercial properties, ultimately helping improve performance and reduce energy usage.

As part of USGBC's [Improve Energy Data Access Campaign](#), the summit brought together local utilities and commercial real estate owners and operators, including local staff from CBRE, Hines, Cushman and Wakefield, the Ryan Group, Xcel and Minnesota Power. Additionally, the summit drew several Minnesota state and city officials and local advocacy groups to discuss the current barriers to sharing energy data and opportunities to improve this process.

Commercial and municipal building owners and managers highlighted specific examples of barriers they experience when requesting data for their properties. They also articulated their need for and interest in this data, and how better data-sharing systems can help them benchmark their buildings. Xcel and Minnesota Power shared their current practices in gathering data from building owners and mentioned planned proposals under design to help improve data sharing. Government officials, including representatives of the Minnesota Public Utilities Commission, as well as outside advocacy groups offered their viewpoints on available policy options to mandate benchmarking and disclosure of building energy usage.

While much of the day focused on developing a local solution to data access problems, presentations by outside utilities, including ComEd of Chicago and Puget Gas and Electric of Washington state, demonstrated ways utilities are working with building owners in their markets through the development of online data sharing tools that deliver monthly aggregated data in a standardized format.

Dialogues like the one in Minneapolis show that private sector stakeholders can have a unified voice in support of improved data sharing policies. While the city of Minneapolis is considering a [benchmarking and disclosure law](#), USGBC believes proactive conversations on data access between all interested



city of Minneapolis is considering a [benchmarking and disclosure law](#), USGBC believes proactive conversations on data access between all interested parties is the most effective way to ensure cooperation and the establishment of best practices in pursuit of energy efficiency.

USGBC is planning to host similar summits in cities across the U.S. By exploring and troubleshooting how to share building energy data in a more standardized and useful format, communities can develop solutions that work best for local parties. As we scale up these efforts, we can effectively transform the way building energy data is shared and, ultimately, improve the performance of buildings across our country. USGBC looks forward to working with our local chapters to bring key stakeholders together to find customized ways they too can improve energy data access in their states.

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