

# CALIFORNIA CITIES SHINE IN \$5 MILLION ENERGY PRIZE CHALLENGE

In recent history, highly visible prize competitions have spurred innovative approaches to some of the most difficult challenges facing mankind. Despite the many innovative efficiency measures now in place throughout the country, the United States wastes more than half of all energy produced, according to a report issued by Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory. In response, Georgetown University set forth an elaborate competition, pitting 60 communities nationwide against each other in an effort to save energy and win \$5 million.

Eight California cities — Berkeley, Chula Vista, Claremont, Davis, Fremont, Palo Alto, San Mateo and Sunnyvale — are competing for the big prize. These cities have spent the past year rallying their staff, community and utility partners in an effort to demonstrate success in reducing energy consumption. With another year to go before the competition closes in 2017, the California communities are sharing their motivation, best practices and lessons learned from participating in the contest.

## San Mateo Stays True to Its Climate Action Plan

The City of San Mateo joined the Georgetown University Energy Prize competition as a way to jump-start the implementation of its Climate Action Plan, which was formally adopted in 2015. Staff says the competition provides a framework for the city to track its progress in improving energy efficiency in its community. Because Climate Action Plan implementation is the city's primary goal, San Mateo has focused on implementing measures in its plan, including public outreach and education, promoting Property Assessed Clean Energy financing and moving forward with municipal energy-efficiency improvements.

City officials say the key to success is leveraging as many resources as possible. Mayor Joe Goethals says, "The Georgetown University Energy Prize is a fun way for local governments, come together to engage and motivate our residents to achieve a common sustainability goal."

San Mateo is working with the Home Upgrade Program, which is run by the San Mateo County Office of Sustainability and El Concilio, a community-based nonprofit organization. Both serve a support role for public outreach and education in the city's efforts to participate in the Georgetown University Energy Prize

and the CoolCalifornia Challenge, a statewide program focusing on energy efficiency. The city is not devoting specific resources to the competition, but rather leveraging capital funds and other dollars set aside for Climate Action Plan implementation to pay for some of the larger projects, such as LED streetlight replacements and upgrades to municipal facilities. In addition, Pacific Gas and Electric provided \$20,000 in dedicated funds to San Mateo and the other five communities in its service territory that are competing for the Georgetown University Energy Prize.

## Chula Vista Leverages City Conservation Programs

Chula Vista's Climate Action Plan has been in place for over 15 years. For this growing Southern California city, the Georgetown University Energy Prize provides an opportunity to measure its progress against other sustainable cities throughout the nation. Chula Vista has a long history of successful community partnerships, but securing participation still posed a challenge. The city created a number of marketing materials to support the effort, including flyers, posters, social media posts, custom emails and a webpage to help raise awareness of the competition. The marketing materials ask residents to commit to three energy-saving actions, which now serve as a basis for city-led assistance.

"Participating in the Georgetown University Energy Prize allowed us to spotlight the great energy-saving actions our residents have taken while encouraging them to commit to do more to help our city win," says Chula Vista Mayor Mary Casillas Salas. "The idea of winning the prize also gave our staff new ways to engage residents about improving energy savings in their homes."

In the first year of the competition, Chula Vista engaged over 200 households, and more than 150 of those received a no-cost home energy and water check-up. Over 90 percent of those households took energy-saving action ranging from simple behavior changes to complex whole-home energy upgrades.

The city also teaches the community about the importance of water conservation and its link to energy conservation. City staff leveraged other programs, such as turf replacement, to provide energy-efficiency resources and information about LED lights, new windows and insulation. By providing information on multiple areas of interest, such as energy, water, waste, recycling and compost in one home visit, Chula Vista engages residents in the wide variety of sustainability initiatives that the city offers.

## Davis Uses Data to Influence Behavioral Change



*The City of Davis focuses its energy-related efforts on homes and residents.*

For the City of Davis, the Georgetown University Energy Prize is just another stop on the quest for energy efficiency. In 2014 the California Energy Commission gave Davis a \$300,000 grant to create a renewable energy and energy-efficiency roadmap for the city. The roadmap targets building-related improvements to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and seeks to make Davis "Net Zero," meaning that each year the city would generate as much energy as it uses.

Because the residential sector accounts for 64 percent of the total energy used in Davis, the city puts much of its focus there. Davis uses various data resources to better understand its community and residents. For example, permitting data indicates which residents may soon need to replace their heating, ventilation and air conditioning units — HVAC is vital to residents of this region, which has extremely hot summers. Knowing which residents might soon need to replace their HVAC units allows staff to target messages about energy efficiency to those individuals before they purchase equipment.

City staff can use community-based social marketing strategies to better understand and effectively communicate with residents. “We are not just creating ad campaigns and flyers,” says Mayor Dan Wolk. “We are looking for smarter ways to communicate with our community for long-term benefits.”

## Claremont Engages Volunteers and Students

Like many of the communities profiled here, the City of Claremont says that the Georgetown University Energy Prize provides a platform to build upon its past efforts around energy efficiency and community engagement. Claremont launched a large public engagement effort in 2006 during its General Plan update in which sustainability became a major focus. Three years later, the city created the Claremont Sustainable City Plan and a new nonprofit, Sustainable Claremont, to help carry out some of the proposed programs and policies in both plans. The city provides some financial support to Sustainable Claremont. This support allows the organization to dedicate the necessary time and attention to coordinating large community-based efforts, such as the Georgetown University Energy Prize challenge. “Coordination is the key to make sure that we are all moving in the same direction,” says Claremont’s Principal Planner Chris Veirs.



Sustainable Claremont targets a broad cross section of its population, including college students who bring a unique energy to the city’s efforts. Claremont is also working to appeal to the private sector by exploring the opportunity to build a solar panel fabrication facility that could create over 500 jobs and save Claremont residents over \$6.5 million annually in utility expenses by providing energy-producing solar panels.

The community’s efforts have increased participation in programs related to energy conservation and renewable energy. The City of Claremont’s Georgetown University Energy Prize activities build on its prior engagement in state-run energy conservation programs like Energy Upgrade California. The city’s per-capita participation in Energy Upgrade California remains about 20 times that of Los Angeles County. Claremont also boasts average energy savings of 28 percent per retrofitted home.

“We are certainly not going to stop after this competition,” says Council Member Joe Lyons. “This is meant to be a sustained program that actually gains momentum as time goes on.”

## Palo Alto Launches a Virtual Lottery



*The City of Palo Alto's energy-savings lottery prizes will include an electric vehicle lease.*

The City of Palo Alto is the only municipality in California that operates a full suite of city-owned utility services — electricity, gas, water, wastewater and fiber optic. For years, the city has been providing its residents with home energy reports and neighborhood comparisons in an effort to show how a customer's energy use stacks up compared to their neighbors' energy use. In February 2016 Palo Alto launched a new online portal where customers can view in one place their usage and savings of water, gas and electricity.

In the fall, the city plans to launch an energy-savings lottery competition. For every percentage of energy a resident can save over their previous year's baseline, he or she will receive a virtual lottery ticket that will be entered in a drawing for prizes ranging from photovoltaic solar systems to hot water heaters and even an electric vehicle lease.

At a collaborative workshop conducted by contest coordinators in March 2016, Palo Alto shared these and some of its other best practices with the other California cities competing in the Georgetown University Energy Prize challenge. "We are all in this together," says Lacey Lutes, a utility account representative with the City of Palo Alto Utilities who serves as lead on the city's Georgetown University Energy Prize efforts. "We want to create programs that are replicable and accessible to communities of all sizes."

## California Cities Share Best Practices

Staff from Fremont, Sunnyvale and Berkeley also attended the forum and shared their best practices. The City of Berkeley recently passed a Building Energy Saving Ordinance that requires building owners to complete energy efficiency assessments and publicly report the findings, and the City of Fremont uses data and mapping to identify and target households that use the most energy. The City of Sunnyvale is turning to social media platforms to encourage its community to save energy and help win the prize.

The competition is close, with many of the participating California cities ranking in the top 20 of the communities competing for the big prize. For the most recent standings, visit <https://guelp.iconics.com>.

## Beyond Saving Energy

The \$5 million prize will not be awarded solely on the basis of which city can show the most energy savings during the two-year competition. The judging committee will evaluate participating communities on a set of criteria that includes a community's ability to develop and implement a plan that is innovative, replicable and scalable. The competition will announce the winner in June 2017.

## Everyone Wins

Even though only one city will win the \$5 million prize, competition organizers say that every participating community is a winner. “In the first nine months of the competition, participants recorded energy savings totaling more than \$45 million and reduced the greenhouse gas emissions equivalent to taking one car off the road every five minutes,” says Christopher Nelson, Georgetown University Energy Prize project director. “A competition like this focuses everyone’s attention on energy efficiency for a finite period of time, but the effects of programs and policies created during that time will last for years — even decades — to come.”

### About the Institute for Local Government

This tip sheet is a service of the Institute for Local Government (ILG) whose mission is to promote good government at the local level with practical, impartial and easy-to-use resources for California communities. ILG is the nonprofit 501(c)(3) research and education affiliate of the League of California Cities, the California State Association of Counties and the California Special Districts Association.

© 2016 League of California Cities®. All rights reserved. Reprinted with permission from the July 2016 issue of Western City® magazine, the monthly publication of the League of California Cities®. For more information, visit [www.westerncity.com](http://www.westerncity.com).