Choose a **Scope of Work**

**Reviewing Your Audit Report and Setting Priorities**

**You Don’t Have to Do Everything at Once** – Most people can’t afford to tackle every recommendation in their energy audit report in year one. Of course, a larger project scope up front will be more cost effective in the long run.

**Trust your Contractor** – It’s your contractor’s job to help you narrow your work scope to meet your budget and maximize energy savings and home comfort. Ask them to talk you through your options.

**Don’t Forget about Financing** – If your ideal project scope is outside your budget, you might consider taking on a loan in order to get a critical energy upgrade completed. It may be possible for energy savings to offset the cost of a loan, resulting in less overall spending.

**Do-It-Yourself** – If you’d like to do some of the work yourself, let your contractor know up front so they can help you identify good do-it-yourself projects within your overall work scope.

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**Complete Your **Energy Upgrades**

**Tips and Expectations for When the Crew is On Site**

- Most projects take 2 to 4 days to complete.
- Don’t forget to clean out any areas where work will be done BEFORE the crew arrives.
- If your contractor is installing spray foam, you and your pets will need to stay away for at least 24 hours while the foam cures.
- Ask questions along the way if you’re seeing anything that doesn’t make sense to you.
- Your contractor should do a test-out with a blower door after project completion.
- Be sure you have good documentation of what work was done, should you ever decide to sell the house.
- If you qualify for rebates, you can request that your rebate be sent directly to your contractor, meaning less cash out-of-pocket for you when you pay your contractor.
What to Expect from your Energy Audit Report

Important Notes for Reviewing your Report

Your energy audit report should include a **comprehensive list of recommendations** for making your home more energy efficient. Many of these recommendations will be familiar, since you contractor likely mentioned them to you during your energy audit. Things to keep in mind as you review your report:

- You are under no obligation to complete any of the recommended improvements.
- If any of the recommendations do not make sense to you, ask for clarification.
- Each recommendation should be listed with a price tag.
- Your report may also include estimated energy savings. If not, ask your contractor to explain what they think your energy savings might be, and which recommendations will yield the most energy savings.
- Ask which recommendations will generate the most increase in home comfort.
- Ask which recommendations will address any issues you are concerned about (e.g. ice dams, moisture.)
- While it’s OK not to complete ALL of the recommendations at once, try to do as much as you possibly can. It will always be most cost effective to tackle more improvements all at once than to pick and choose over time. Ask about financing options to help you afford a larger project.
- Ask for help narrowing your work scope. It is your contractor’s job to help you select the right combination of recommended improvements to meet your budget and priorities. Some recommendations won't work unless combined with others.
- If you choose to move ahead, it is common practice to hire the contractor who completed your energy audit to complete your weatherization project. Hiring a different contractor is not recommended (or even allowed, if you are participating in a rebate program).
- If you are handy, you can ask your contractor which recommendations (or parts of recommendations) could be completed by you as a do-it-yourself project.
- If you qualify for NHSaves or Efficiency Vermont rebates, your report should include your estimated total rebate. NHSaves or Efficiency Vermont must approve of your final work scope and may require you to commit to a certain minimum work scope in order for rebates to apply. Your contractor will handle this approval process for you and ensure your project is eligible for rebates.

Common Energy Efficiency Recommendations

- **Air sealing** – Addresses a variety of gaps, cracks, penetrations, and other holes that allow cold air to enter and heat to escape from your home. Often, air sealing is focused on the rim joist in the basement or crawlspace, plumbing and wiring penetrations, recessed lighting, around chimneys and attic hatches, and fans and ventilation systems. Weather-stripping may also be recommended for exterior doors and sometimes windows. Air sealing should always be done before insulation is installed, and works best when installed in conjunction with insulation upgrades.

- **Cellulose** – An insulation product made of reclaimed paper saturated with a borate mixture to resist fire, mold, rodents, and insects. Cellulose is non-toxic and can be applied in a variety of ways. Attics typically have loose-fill or blown-in cellulose where a layer of the product blankets the floor of the attic after air sealing measures are completed. Cellulose insulation can also be blown into wall cavities and other enclosed spaces, often called dense-pack cellulose because filling wall cavities requires greater air pressure and a denser fill than blowing insulation for an attic.
• **Rigid foam insulation** – Sheets of stiff foam, a few inches thick, with a lot of insulating power per inch of thickness. Rigid foam sheets can be cut or assembled to cover any sized surface and are commonly used to insulate attic hatch doors, box sills, and concrete basement walls.

• **Spray foam** – A closed-cell polyurethane spray foam that air seals and insulates in one step. Spray foam can be blown into walls, attic spaces, and between floor joists to insulate and reduce air leakage. It can also be used to seal air leaks around window and door frames, and electrical and plumbing penetrations. To insulate an entire attic or basement, professional installers mix a two-part foam that expands once sprayed on. During installation, **you and your pets will need to vacate your home for a few days until the foam cures and the fumes air out**. Once cured, the foam does not off-gas.

Your recommendations will likely focus on air sealing and insulation improvements in the basement and attic, where the majority of heat loss occurs in most homes. **Your recommendations typically will NOT include:**

• **Replacing windows** (not cost effective from an energy standpoint unless you are already planning to replace windows for other reasons)

• **Adding insulation in your walls** (often difficult and less effective than adding insulation in the attic and basement, unless you are replacing siding or refinishing rooms with exterior walls anyway)

**Health and Safety**

Your contractor should be certified by the national Building Performance Institute, which means they take an integrated approach to how a home’s systems work together, with a focus on home health, safety, durability, energy efficiency, and comfort. As a result, **there may be health and safety recommendations included in your report**. Some health and safety recommendations MUST be addressed before any weatherization work can be completed. This is for your own safety. Examples include:

• Removal of knob and tube wiring
• Removal of vermiculite (funding available for some homeowners at www.zaitrust.com)
• Radon remediation
• Mold remediation

Other health and safety recommendations may be completed as part of your weatherization work, like installing a bathroom fan to improve ventilation.

**Contract and Terms**

Your audit report will likely include an addendum stating your contractor’s terms should you decide to move ahead with a contract. Pay attention to workmanship guarantees, the length of time that the offer is valid, quality assurance mechanisms, and other terms and conditions. If anything doesn’t make sense to you, ask your contractor to clarify before you make a verbal commitment or sign any documents.

If you are participating in a rebate program, pay attention to any deadlines imposed by NHSaves or Efficiency Vermont for committing to a weatherization project. This is particularly important in New Hampshire, where rebate funding is more limited. If you do not abide by your NHSaves deadline, NHSaves might give your rebate to someone else. NHSaves is able to extend its deadlines upon request, but only if you and your contractor clearly communicate that you need more time and still plan on moving ahead.
Questions to Ask Before Signing a Contract

Reviewing Your Contract and Final Work Scope

After you go back and forth with your contractor to settle on a final work scope, ask for a copy of that work scope and review it carefully. Are all the following clear to you:

- Is everything you expected to see included in the work scope?
- Which parts of your project will be managed by your contractor, and which parts are you expected to coordinate on your own? (You might be asked to hire other contractors to complete parts of your work scope not directly related to weatherization, like electrical work, hazard remediation, etc.)
- If you qualify for rebates, is it clear how much you are expected to pay vs. how much NHSaves or Efficiency Vermont will pay toward your project?
- What is the payment plan? How much money do you owe, and when?
- Is there a workmanship guarantee?
- What mechanisms are in place for quality assurance?
- Are there any other terms and conditions?

Don’t hesitate to ask your contractor for clarification on these or any other points.

Questions to Ask Your Contractor before Signing a Contract

- **Who will be doing each part of the work?** Some contractors will subcontract some or all of your work scope. Ask about the qualifications of everyone who will be working on your home.
- **What does the contractor expect you, the customer, to do before coming on site?** This might include:
  - Clear your attic or basement of personal items/debris (ask how much needs to be cleared, and whether moving items to the center of the space is sufficient).
  - Confirm you can remove yourself and your pets from the property for the designated amount of time (usually 1-2 days) if sprayfoam is being installed.
  - Address any health/safety issues (e.g., remediation of vermiculite, mold, etc.)
  - Complete any do-it-yourself aspects of the project, if you have made such arrangements with your contractor.
- **When can they start the project?** Be sure to share any scheduling needs on your end (e.g. planned vacations, alignment with other home renovation projects, preferred completion deadline)
- **How long will the project last?** Will work crews be there all day or just in the morning? Will there be loud machinery or music playing? Will there be dust or construction materials in the living space? Will the work happen on consecutive days, or will the crew need to come back at a later date to finish?
- **What, if anything, could change this work scope and price after you sign?** There can be unexpected changes in any project. It doesn’t hurt to ask if your contractor has any sense of what kinds of mid-stream changes could come up in your unique case.

Questions to Ask Yourself before Signing a Contract

- **How will I pay for this?** If you are taking out a loan, talk to your lender BEFORE signing your contract.

This guide was created by Vital Communities in November 2019. Contact energy@vitalcommunities.org with questions.