



# ENERGY STAR®

## Utility Benchmarking Data Access Reference Guide for SPPs

The **Reference Guide** provides general tips and answers the commonly asked questions. This information will be useful to both SPPs and utilities.

### ***What is Benchmarking?***

Energy benchmarking is the measurement of a building's energy use to determine how it is performing in comparison to similar buildings. Benchmarking offers a relative understanding of energy consumption and makes it easier for building owners to identify opportunities for energy efficiency measures. These energy reductions can reduce the overall operating cost of the building, therefore increase net operating incoming (NOI) for building owners while lowering utility costs for tenants.

### ***Why should I use benchmarking?***

Benchmarking offers a relative understanding of energy consumption and makes it easier for building owners to identify opportunities for energy efficiency measures. These energy reductions can reduce the overall operating cost of the building, therefore increase net operating incoming (NOI) for building owners while lowering utility costs for tenants.

### ***Why is aggregate, whole-building energy data needed?***

In order to benchmark a building and identify savings opportunities, an understanding of the entire building's energy usage is needed, specifically, consumption information from owner-paid and tenant-paid energy meters. Units within a building are often individually metered, which means that tenants pay the utility (i.e. utility) for their consumption, and as a result, own their consumption data.

### ***What specific scenarios would aggregate, whole-building energy data be needed?***

- Compliance with state or local benchmarking ordinance
- Green lender reporting requirements
- Identification of energy efficiency measures
- Application for green building certification (ENERGY STAR, LEED, etc.)
- Voluntary or investor-driven energy reporting (e.g. GRESB)
- Internal sustainability reporting

### ***Utilities have strict policies on sharing customer data. How are privacy concerns addressed when sharing aggregate, whole-building data?***

Customer data privacy policies limit what data can be shared with the Service and Product Provider (SPP) or building owner, making it challenging to measure whole-building energy usage (i.e. tenant-paid meters plus owner-paid meters). Utilities have found that customer's privacy can be protected by combining the entire building's consumption data, also known as aggregated energy data. Aggregated data is stripped of identifiers associated with the account holders. Given that consumption information from individual tenant meters cannot be shared without tenant authorization, utilities may agree to send aggregate energy usage of the building. While there is no standard in place at the national level, we have observed that the aggregation threshold is often between three to five tenants; meaning that if a building has more tenants, tenant authorization is not required to release the data. Conversely, if a building has fewer tenants, authorization from each tenant is



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required. This aggregation threshold simplifies the authorization process for the building owner, given that requesting forms from all tenants would become an extremely limiting barrier to energy efficiency.

### ***How do I obtain the aggregate, whole-building energy data? Do I need to confirm that the data is accurate?***

Utilities either upload the data directly to the building's ENERGY STAR Portfolio Manager account or send the data in a template provided by ENERGY STAR Portfolio Manager for easy uploading. Data format and delivery are dependent on if the utility offers benchmarking data as a service, or manually to customers. The latter is common for utilities who receive fewer requests from customers for aggregate, whole-building data. Once the data is obtained, it is important to confirm that the utility has provided usage data for the correct number of meters and timeframe requested.

### ***I'm a utility, why can't the customer use consumption data from their bills?***

Most commercial buildings are individually metered, meaning the building owner pays for energy meters in common areas, while tenants pay for their individual energy meter(s). Building owners only have access to the bills that they pay and do not have access to tenant bills. As a result, energy data from owner-paid bills would be an incomplete benchmark of the building. The energy usage of common areas is often low and consistent in comparison to tenant-occupied spaces. By combining all the meters in an aggregate format, we can fully understand the building's energy usage.

### ***What are the benefits to providing aggregate data to customers?***

Utilities who provide aggregate, whole-building energy data are supporting customers who want to measure and reduce energy use. Customers who track and manage energy consumption are more likely to participate in energy efficiency incentive programs. By offering this as a service to customers, utilities can build rapport with customers who are actively engaging in energy management practices and who are more likely to take advantage of incentives.

### ***I'm an SPP, what other types of property and/or building information should I have on hand for this request? What additional information might be requested?***

In addition to the fields listed on the data workbook, it is helpful to have the following for verification purposes:

- Property and/or building type
- Number of buildings on the property
- Total square footage of the property and/or building(s)
- Number of tenant-occupied units
- Number of energy meters associated with the property (owner-paid plus tenant-paid meters)
- Number of owner-paid energy meters
- Account number(s) for owner-paid meters
- Last bill amount for each owner-paid account
- Date property was acquired by property owner
- Property owner's tax ID number
- Property owner-signed letter authorizing SPP access to energy data



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- Confirmation of energy meter number identifiers: The utility may respond to the request and ask the SPP to verify the energy meters associated with the building/property. It is likely that the SPP will know the total sum of energy meters associated with the property (owner-paid plus tenant-paid meters), as well as the number identifiers for the owner-paid meter(s). However, SPPs (or property owners) will likely not have the meter number identifiers associated with each tenant unit. As a result, the SPP will only be able to confirm that the total sum of energy meters that the utility sent is accurate. Be sure to explain this nuance but confirm that the total number of meters appears accurate.

### ***What if the utility cannot or will not provide aggregate, whole-building data?***

If the utility is unable to provide aggregate data, you can upload bill data from owner-paid energy meters to understand how those spaces are performing and identify energy efficiency opportunities. Depending on the utility, it is possible that their policies and/or capabilities evolve, and that aggregate data could be provided in the future.

### ***What is the purpose of the Data Request Workbook and do I need to include it in my request?***

The **Data Request Workbook** should be sent with the initial email request to the utility. The purpose of the workbook is to give the utility the building information needed (see either Tab A or B); as well as a clear formatting structure to complete the request (see Tab C). The **Data Request Workbook** also provides the SPP with a data source that can be easily uploaded to ENERGY STAR Portfolio Manager by copy and pasting the contents of Tab C into ENERGY STAR's data upload template. Additional details on page 4 of this [fact sheet](#).

The **Data Request Workbook** features:

- Instructions on how to use the workbook
- Background information, which closely mirrors the information contained within the **Reference Guide**
- Property information tabs to be completed by the SPP (i.e. single vs. multiple building property)
- Aggregate data template for the utility to populate