



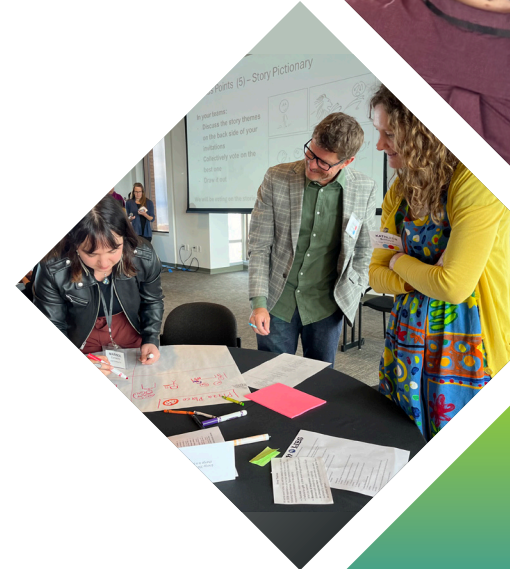
Success Story: Strategic Energy Management

Rooted in Innovation: How the Northwest Created the National SEM Movement

For nearly two decades, NEEA has pioneered and advanced strategic energy management (SEM), the continuous energy efficiency improvement process for commercial and industrial buildings.

Using a structured approach developed by the alliance, SEM drives deep, lasting change in the ways businesses manage their energy performance and costs on an ongoing basis. Across the Northwest and the country, businesses now utilize the proven SEM framework to increase organizational commitment, improve economic efficiency, plan and implement projects that reduce energy waste, and continually measure energy-performance outcomes.

The idea was born in 2006, when NEEA applied the quality management methods of ISO 9001, a globally recognized standard for quality management, to achieve continual energy efficiency improvements in industries of high energy use. While ISO 9001 was proven to improve business processes and workflows, the underlying concept had never before been leveraged to improve energy efficiency. When the alliance's pioneering SEM programs achieved deep, continuous energy savings for hospitals, food processors and paper manufacturers, the SEM concept evolved into a utility program model enabling utilities to offer SEM programs directly to their commercial and industrial customers. For the first time, utilities could pay continuous incentives for the ongoing savings delivered by SEM principles. This novel incentives model not only motivated more savings and program participants, but it also provided utilities with a new and effective way to strengthen relationships with their customers.





2024 NW SEM Collaborative Fall Workshop

From Innovation to Infrastructure

With Northwest utilities running SEM programs directly with their customers, and SEM entrenched in how businesses operated in the Northwest, the alliance turned its attention to creating an infrastructure program to support further SEM advancement. By conducting research, fostering community and collaboration, and developing tools and educational content, the alliance continued to refine the SEM practice it had helped establish.

NEEA's SEM infrastructure work included launching SEMHub, a website featuring a searchable resource library of proprietary tools, market research, reports and white papers developed by the alliance and the wider SEM community. Over the years, the alliance developed many tools and resources to empower utilities and commercial building professionals with essential SEM insight and strategy, including:



Energy Management Assessment (EMA) Tool

An interactive survey tool that provides strategic, confidential analysis of an organization's energy management practices to offer specific opportunities for improvement.



Online Courses

Virtual training courses that help building managers and their teams establish and maintain strong and sustainable SEM processes.



Energy Talk Cards

Engaging visual tools that stimulate energy efficiency conversation and learning among facility staff.



Case Studies

Real-world examples of the many ways utilities and facilities have implemented successful SEM programs throughout the Northwest and beyond.

After serving the Northwest for years, SEMHub has now taken the national stage. With SEM practice firmly established throughout the industry, SEM practitioners can now take ownership of and build upon established resources and infrastructure. In 2025, NEEA ended its direct investment in SEMHub, passing the site and its resources on to the SEM professionals and utility representatives of the North American SEM Collaborative, equipping them to carry on a legacy more than 15 years in the making.

Northwest SEM by the Numbers

49.7 aMW

of energy saved by utility partners (2020–2024)

200+

Energy Management Assessment tool users

23

SEM online courses

900+

Course completions

12

Regional workshops

300+

Unique workshop attendees

90

Utilities, government offices, efficiency organizations and private companies represented

148

Resources posted to SEMHub.com

Teamwork Makes SEM Work

NEEA helped to build a thriving SEM community in the Northwest by convening the NW SEM Collaborative, a group of active and committed SEM professionals, utility representatives and regional energy organizations. Founded in 2011, the Collaborative served for years as a regional catalyst and guiding force for SEM advancement, bringing together many perspectives on the developing field of SEM, including those of program administrators, implementers, evaluators and researchers.

Committed to bringing SEM to scale in the region, the Collaborative and its members worked together to accelerate learning and develop solutions to technical, market and policy challenges. These cooperative efforts included an annual NW SEM Fall Workshop, convening scores of regional and national SEM practitioners to share and discuss the latest SEM successes and data. The Collaborative also created a series of SEM working groups, composed exclusively of volunteers. Each working group focused on a unique aspect of SEM practice to share challenges and opportunities—and develop solutions. Over the years, the working groups created a host of industry-leading resources, including white papers, one-page guides, templates and presentations.

With the Northwest at the forefront of a national SEM emergence, the NW SEM Collaborative integrated with the North American SEM Collaborative in 2025. Now, Northwest SEM professionals lead a regional chapter of the national organization and will continue serving as a strong voice in the national SEM conversation for many years to come.



“The leadership teams of the Northwest and North American SEM Collaboratives have worked diligently to ensure a smooth integration that honors our shared history and future potential. We look forward to continuing our impactful work across the Northwest and throughout North America in the years ahead.”

—Anna Kelly, North American SEM Collaborative Chair

A Timeline of Northwest SEM Leadership



Find out more about SEM and other NEEA Market Transformation programs at neea.org/market-transformation-portfolio.

