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AEP Ohio completes gridSMART Demonstration Project

by [Dave Waitkus](#) on January 15, 2014

(Story by Fay White)

The end of AEP Ohio's gridSMART Demonstration Project Dec. 31 marks an exciting beginning for the company's future.



This map shows the gridSMART Demonstration Project test area.

Launched in 2009, the project — a unique pilot program — tested approximately 110,000 smart meters, new distribution grid technology and energy sources, plug-in electric vehicles, smart appliances, consumer systems and products to help customers manage electricity use and costs. AEP Ohio residential and business customers participated in the testing of more than 13 field technologies.

“What we've learned from the gridSMART Demonstration Project will help us continue to enhance the way we serve customers well into the future,” said Pablo Vegas, AEP Ohio president and chief operating officer. “The project allowed AEP Ohio to illustrate how smart grid technologies can provide customers with greater energy control, improve electricity delivery and reduce energy consumption to delay the need to build more power plants. With gridSMART Phase 2, we plan to take what we've learned to deliver electricity more efficiently while improving reliability, customer service and energy savings.”

Demonstration Project tested a number of energy-saving programs

The heart of the gridSMART Demonstration Project is the smart meter, a digital electric meter equipped with two-way communications technology. With the installation of the smart meter, the company was able to develop and offer many beneficial services and programs.

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The heart of the Demonstration Project is the smart meter, a digital electric meter equipped with two-way communications technology.

Because smart meters collect real-time information about customers' power usage, the company is better equipped to detect power outage locations, improve reliability and provide faster response to certain customer service requests such as meter reading and service connections.

One of the project's goals was to develop programs that would help customers manage their electricity use and save money. Some of the programs AEP Ohio tested include SMART Shift, a time-of-day rate plan that helped customers save money by moving electricity use to off peak times, and SMART CoolingSM, an air-conditioning conservation program that helped reduce peak demand during the summer months.

Smart meter technology also was instrumental in developing the eViewSM device, which not only helps customers monitor their electric use and costs, but also estimates current month's usage so customers can stay within their budget.

Other smart grid technologies also tested

In addition to smart meters, the company was able to test other smart grid technologies, such as:

- **Distribution Automation Circuit Reconfiguration (DACR)** – A system that allows the re-routing of electricity, resulting in quicker restoration times.
- **Volt Var Optimization (VVO)** – Technology that manages voltage as power moves from substations to household appliances.
- **Smart Appliances** – Clothes washers, dryers, refrigerators and other appliances that can work with smart meters to respond to high energy demand and operate all or parts of the appliance when costs are lower.
- **Community Energy Storage (CES)** devices – Battery units that help keep the lights on for a period of time during power outages.
- **Plug-In Electric Vehicles** – Automobiles that are powered by gasoline engines and electric motors.

Many AEP Ohio and Ohio-based employees worked on the project

The successful deployment of these technologies was made possible through a collaborative effort of employees, contractors and vendors, calling on various areas of expertise within AEP Ohio and the AEP Service Corporation, including engineering, IT, operations, research and development, customer service, distribution, corporate communications and marketing.

"More than 820 employees and contractors have worked on the gridSMART project, clocking almost a million hours combined," said Scott Osterholt, AEP Ohio manager of advanced meter infrastructure and project manager for the gridSMART project. "The input provided during the program by employees has been invaluable in numerous ways. Most significantly, employee evaluation of devices and programs allowed for fine-tuning and adjustments before deploying them to customers."

Industry leaders also contributed to the success of the project, including Battelle; General

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Electric; Silver Spring Networks; Pacific Northwest National Laboratory, a federally funded research and development center managed by Battelle; Lockheed Martin; and S&C Electric. Other regulatory and stakeholder collaborators include the Public Utilities Commission of Ohio (PUCO); the Ohio Consumers Counsel; PJM; and the Electric Power Research Institute (EPRI).

gridSMART from AEP Ohio Tour mobile

To educate consumers about the project, the company traveled to project-area community events, festivals, fairs and schools with its gridSMART from AEP Ohio tour.



The gridSMART from AEP Ohio Tour mobile travelled to more than 65 Ohio events during the project period. Approximately 40,000 consumers visited the mobile to learn about new smart grid technologies.

The tour featured a converted recreational vehicle outfitted with six interactive exhibits designed to demonstrate aspects of the gridSMART Demonstration Project.

Over the course of the project, more than 40,000 consumers visited the gridSMART mobile to learn about smart meters, programs and other technologies.

Lessons learned helped shape company's new business model

Customer experience and feedback received during the project helped the company learn better ways to deliver electricity more efficiently, keep costs lower and reduce or even eliminate the number of customers affected by outages.

"Results have also aided AEP Ohio in evaluating how we do business and shaping the company's new business model as we evolve from being an integrated utility to a wires-only utility, focused on efficient and consistent delivery of electricity," said Karen Sloneker, AEP Ohio director of customer services and marketing and project director for the gridSMART project.

"Four years of testing a variety of technologies and the impact they have on the power grid has helped determine which technologies work best for both customers and AEP Ohio," Sloneker added.

Next steps to ensure efficient electricity delivery

In September, AEP Ohio proposed a plan to the PUCO to expand Smart Meters, DACR and VVO technologies throughout areas in its service territory. Following regulatory review and approval, the technologies will be deployed during a four-year period.

Plans also are under way to organize community outreach with the gridSMART mobile in some of the proposed Phase 2 communities to educate customers about the benefits of smart meters, DACR and VVO.

"I would like to personally thank everyone who supported and participated in the project," Sloneker said "Your role in this unique pilot program has been essential to its success and to the company's future."

A complete report on AEP Ohio's gridSMART Demonstration Project is being prepared for the Department of Energy and will be available in the very near future.

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