

What should I look for in a Provider?

Inevitably this question comes up in Rater Training. It is a topic we feel passionate about, and of course we have a bias toward our own model. There are many models for HERS Providers. Some offer Provider Services only to their own hired staff. And some hire Raters only as subcontractors. Others may be non-profit or government-funded organizations that employ no Raters at all (their Raters own their own separate businesses).

In general, it would be good to start by reading the Provider's Rater Agreement. This is a RESNET Requirement and will spell out the nature of your relationship with them. Be aware of the minimum RESNET standards (such as the minimum number of Probationary/QA Ratings, minimum number of continuing education credits, etc.) and compare those to what the Provider requires. The Rater Agreement should also spell out the cost of Provider Services.

The most frequently asked question we get from prospective Raters regarding Provider Services is "What does it cost?". Cost is important, especially in a tough economy. However, smart shoppers know how to look beyond cost to also focus on value. We recommend that you ask a potential HERS Provider the following questions (our answers are included for comparison):

Q: Will you compete with me for clients?

A: EnergyLogic's rating service territory extends along the I-25 corridor in Colorado from Colorado Springs to the Wyoming border and from Estes Park to Greeley. We are competitive within this market, but we absolutely will not open field offices out of state that will compete with our Rater Partners. We think it is important to define this relationship up front. How would you feel if after two years of hard work fostering interest and demand for energy ratings in your local market, you find out that your Provider has moved in and opened a field office across the street? Sadly, this happens.

Q: Will you send me business leads?

A: EnergyLogic has a well-earned reputation in the rating industry. We regularly get requests from clients in Western Colorado and surrounding states. We are happy to refer this work to our Rater Partners. However, this should not be interpreted as a guarantee of work.

Q: Do you have a QA Designee on staff, or will that work be subcontracted out?

A: EnergyLogic has seven QA Designees on staff. We do not sub out our QA work. In fact, other Providers turn to us when they need to sub out their own QA work.

Q: What sort of technical assistance is available?

A: EnergyLogic is deeply committed to providing the kind of ongoing technical support that is necessary for new Raters. In addition to our seven QA Designees, we have an internal network of experienced Energy Raters who excel at problem solving. We moderate a rater forum where you can post questions or join in other discussions. Even experienced Raters can benefit from being closely connected to the rating community.

Q: Do you offer additional training?

A: We work in a relatively young and rapidly-evolving industry. As a RESNET Accredited Training Provider, we believe strongly in the importance of Continuing Education. We also recognize the difficulty, particularly for a small rating company, in finding the time and resources to attend a national conference. In the spring of 2009, we will begin to produce a series of short webinars on topics such as “Advanced training for REMRate users,” “EnergyStar Thermal Bypass for Raters and Field Inspectors,” and “REMRate Take Off Worksheet- There *Is* a Better Way.” These Webinars will meet RESNET approval for Continuing Education credits prior to release. They will be available to anyone, but special discounts will be extended to our Rater Partners.

Q: What are your policies regarding software setup?

A: Like most Energy Raters across the country, we use REMRate software to produce energy ratings. REMRate allows the user to add company logos at the top of reports (in addition to the required Provider contact information at the bottom of the Home Energy Rating Certificate). Some Providers require the use of their company logo on all reports. Before we became our own Provider, we didn't like having someone else's logo prominently displayed on REMRate Reports that went out to our clients- we wanted to promote our name, not theirs. As your Provider, we think it's fair to use *your* logos on *your* reports. You may use our logos (with specific permission) when the name recognition benefits you. In general, it is in your best interest to get your company name out there, not ours.

Q: Do you provide a resource library?

A: EnergyLogic maintains an extensive master REMRate library set which includes local utility rates for every place that our Rater Partners work. This library set is updated and distributed once every quarter. Rater Partners are required to use our library set, but may make additions as necessary, as long as the changes are shared with our library manager, who will include them in the next update. This drastically simplifies the QA process and allows new Raters access to an accurate, updated library set that has been growing for several years.

Q: Do you provide report printing?

A: We seek the perfect balance between offering Raters freedom and flexibility and maintaining enough control as a Provider to ensure the industry's highest standards. To that end, new Raters will have restricted print permissions. From a QA perspective, this is necessary to ensure the accuracy of the ratings you produce and to maintain a high standard for your customers. We will require new Raters to submit their building files for review, at which time the files will be returned with the print permissions activated. We can print reports for you as a service, but most Raters prefer to print their own. Once we've seen enough of your ratings to feel comfortable with your accuracy (typically ten to fifteen ratings), there will be no need to submit ratings to us prior to printing reports.

Q: Does your organization have representation on any industry boards or committees?

A: EnergyLogic is active in RESNET, with membership on the RESNET board, Education Committee, Technical Committee, and several steering committees.

Q: Do you offer any additional services or benefits (business development assistance, discounts on software or equipment, etc)?

A: Our Rater Partners receive a discount on setup fees for iRate, EnergyLogic's Industry Award-winning web application. We offer business development assistance for a wide range of topics, from Quickbooks setup to marketing.

Q: How long have you been in business?

A: EnergyLogic was started in 2006 when two separate Colorado rating businesses merged. Its proprietors have been in the industry since the early '90s. As separate companies, EnergySmiths and BuiltWright were their own Providers. EnergyLogic began extending Provider Services to other Raters in 2007. Currently, we provide for Raters in over a dozen states, from Hawaii to Washington D.C.