

# Thought Leaders Speak Out 2023

ENGAGING CUSTOMERS WITH TECHNOLOGY

## Key Takeaways: Empowering C&I Customers to Realize their Resilience, Energy Management & Electrification Goals

Fireside Chat with Xcel Energy and Sparkfund (August 2023)

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The Institute for Electric Innovation's *Thought Leaders Speak Out 2023: Engaging Customers with Technology* series brings together electric company executives with customer responsibilities to share lessons learned and the results of successful customer engagement strategies.

This dialogue focused on C&I customer resilience, energy management & electrification goals and featured a discussion between Emmett Romine of Xcel Energy and Pier LaFarge of Sparkfund on Xcel Energy's recently launched Empower Facilities program in Minnesota. Adam Cooper of IEI provided welcome and closing remarks, and Mary Kipp of Puget Sound Energy moderated the discussion. Key takeaways are summarized and highlighted below.

[Click Here for the Agenda and Speaker Bios](#)

[Watch Puget Sound Energy's Opening Remarks Here](#)

***Delivering customized turnkey solutions to address customer-specific energy needs.***

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Xcel Energy explains the motivation behind establishing new C&I programs under the Empower brand, including Empower Resiliency and Empower Facilities. C&I customers are facing challenges in executing projects due to a lack of expertise and financing options as well as trust in a broader service market.

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Sparkfund describes its mission and perspectives on positioning electric companies as energy transition managers for C&I customers. Sparkfund partners with electric companies to offer program administration, engineering, procurement, and construction services, as well as project finance options to C&I customers thru the Empower Facilities program.

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Xcel Energy discusses key considerations to make Empower Facilities program successful. Clearly communicating the new opportunities and comprehensive solutions available to customers as well as delivering on operational excellence are top of mind considerations for Xcel Energy. A longer-term consideration is building a fleet of load-flexible facilities or resiliency assets with value streams accretive to both the customer and the grid.

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Xcel Energy describes how through a series of meetings and facility assessments, they work to understand customers' objectives (e.g., internal energy efficiency, sustainability, and reliability goals) along with pain points (e.g., existing equipment performance issues, financial, internal capabilities) and propose tailored solutions.

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Xcel Energy explains how energy efficiency technologies create entry points for customers to get involved in the energy management journey. The wide array of solutions available through Empower Facilities enables Xcel Energy to leverage the customer touchpoints to expand offerings beyond traditional energy efficiency solutions, including backup generations and EV infrastructure.

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Sparkfund explains how the Empower Facilities 'as a service' model goes beyond financing options. The model generates opportunities for electric companies to be customers' energy advisors and create additive value through targeted solutions – extending the trust and value proposition as electric companies as energy transition managers. Empower Facilities ensures transparency and flexibility in different financing, functional, and saving guarantee options to help customers start with solutions that help them reach outcomes designed for them.

***Investing in flexible customer-sited assets to meet future grid needs.***

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Sparkfund emphasizes the importance of partnerships and building a value chain that is mutually beneficial for customers, contractor communities, and electric companies to address challenges with the scale of the labor force and affordability required for the clean energy transition.

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Xcel Energy explains how robust load flexibility, leveraging customer-sited assets, will be crucial as the industry makes progress with decarbonization and electrification. Xcel Energy is already seeing demand response events outside of summer peak times. Innovative program designs are needed to build new capabilities and value propositions with customers in an accelerated timeframe.

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Sparkfund posits that a semi-centralized approach to grid planning will be key for a successful energy transition and describes the importance of new tariffs and mechanisms that assign value to allow for a portion of the upfront cost of building energy systems to be included in the rate base and incent customers and their buildings to participate with their buildings as generation and capacity assets of the grid in fundamentally new ways.