



EnergyCAP report

the State of Utilities 2026

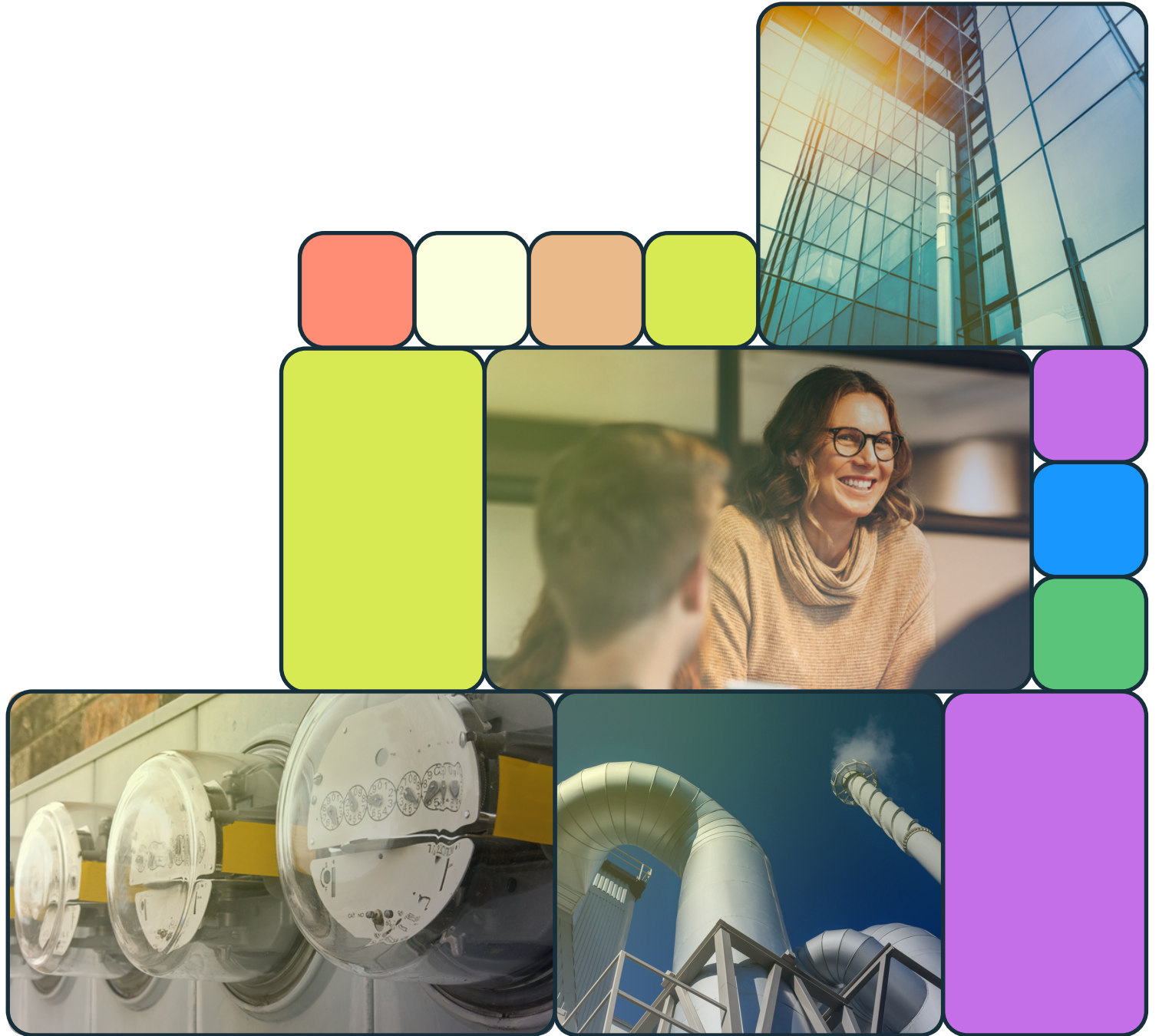


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Introduction



EnergyCAP has spent four decades in the trenches of utility management, and we've supported thousands of organizations as costs, complexity, and scrutiny have climbed.

For our 2026 State of Utilities study, we surveyed hundreds of professionals to understand how organizations are planning, managing, and defending utility spend in a volatile year.

The results are revealing. We found an industry full of resilience: teams that see the value of their data and matured their energy management programs. At the same time, challenges are growing. Utility costs are climbing, budget certainty is slipping as they increase, and many organizations need stronger tools and more buy-in, all while being asked to do more with less.

One theme stands out across the dataset: executives often view energy management very differently than the energy, facilities, and finance teams doing the work day-to-day. In this report, we share the key insights and takeaways from the study to help teams close that gap and move forward with confidence.

Utility costs are rising across every industry, region, and organization type

Key findings:

76%

of respondents report utility costs rising YoY

1 in 5

report year-over-year increases of 10%+

Rising utility costs, and resulting budget increases, are the single most universal finding in the survey. Three-quarters of all respondents are seeing budgets increase, many in the double digits. Less than 5% of respondents are experiencing a downward trend. This cuts across every sector, organization size, and geography.

This backdrop isn't surprising. Energy prices are rising at twice the rate of inflation, climbing to their highest level in more than two decades. Infrastructure constraints, extreme weather, and the rising energy demand of AI are adding new pressure to an already tight system.

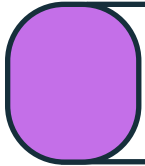
The net effect: energy management gets judged through a financial lens via budget impact, forecast variance, and ROI proof of projects, tools, and investments. Energy, sustainability, and facilities teams are expected to speak the language of finance, but it's equally critical to educate other teams about the importance of usage, benchmarking, and project metrics.

EnergyCAP's take

Rising energy costs put the rest of the survey into perspective. Alongside finding and fixing waste, controlling or reducing utility spend tops 2026 priorities. But too often, the first “reveal” of skyrocketing costs is a bill that lands 10%+ higher than expected. And you can't “make it up next month”—utilities are driven by consumption, so surprises compound until you pinpoint the drivers and correct course.

Our advice:

- **Budget with confidence.** Utility budgets shouldn't be a copy/paste of last year's spend. Normalize for weather, building use, and occupancy.
- **Scrutinize your bills.** Late fees and billing errors are low-hanging fruit that reduce cost without changing a single lightbulb.
- **Add submeters.** Interval data flags leaks and spikes early, supports disputes, and proves ECM savings even when rates rise.



Confidence is mixed, and 100% certainty is the outlier

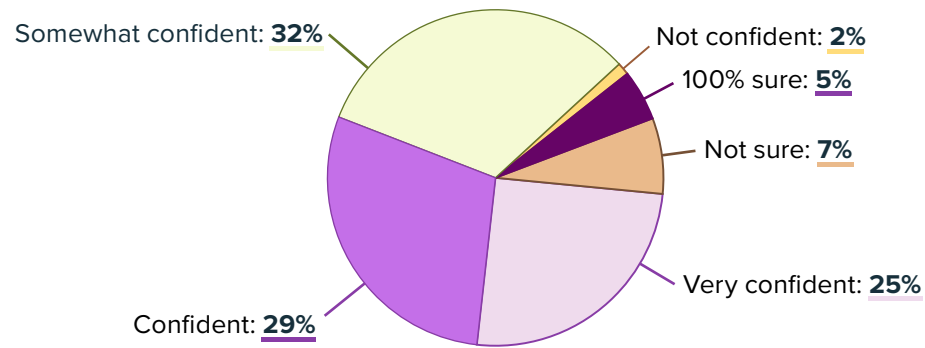


CHART 1 | 2026 budget forecast confidence

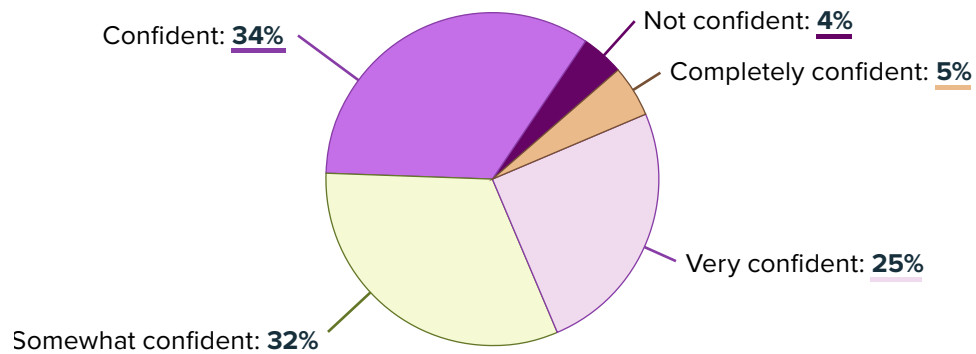


CHART 2 | Confidence and certainty

Which best describes your current approach to energy management today?

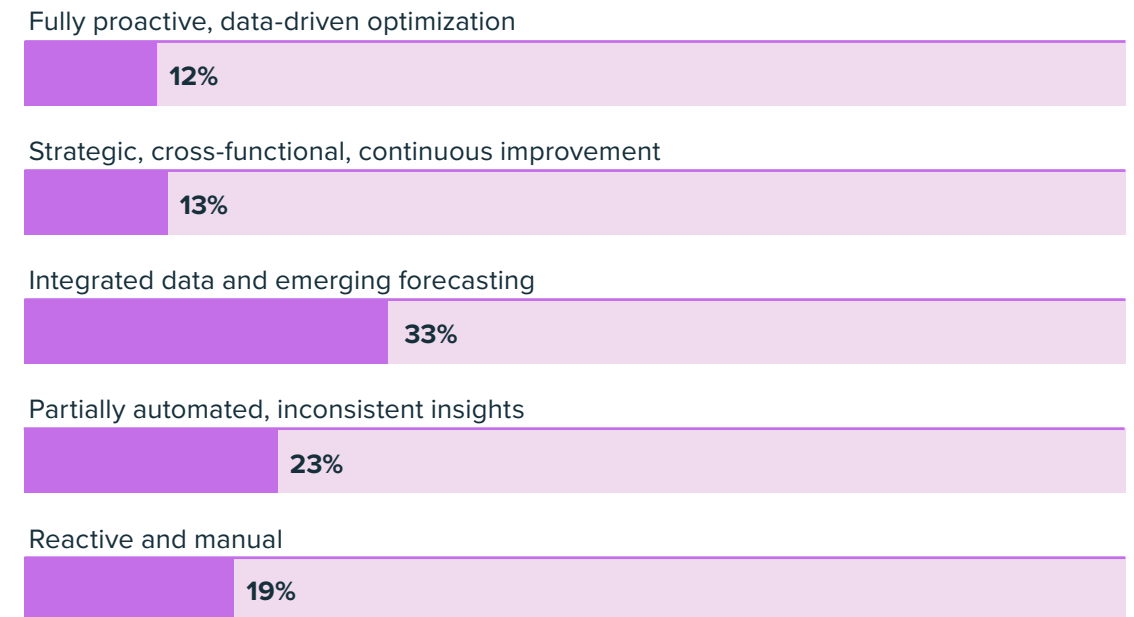


CHART 3 | Energy management approach (Confidence in program)

Key findings:

40%+

of respondents are not fully confident that they've accurately budgeted for utilities in the next 12 months.

1 in 3

organizations aren't fully confident they'll hit their energy management goals, while nearly 60% feel reasonably confident overall.

54%

(the majority) report that they are confident or very confident, but only 5% report 100% surety.

56%

sit in the middle on strategy, describing themselves as working toward better automation insights and forecasting, while 1 in 5 remain reactive and manual.

Across budgeting, goal confidence, and overall strategy, responses cluster in the middle. A meaningful share of respondents report strong uncertainty, most feel “okay”, and a small group reports complete certainty across multiple measures.

Growing uncertainty is expected with energy costs rising at unprecedented rates, even for organizations with strong teams and tools. Volatility doesn't just raise expenses, it introduces more variance into planning and makes “confidence” harder to claim.

“

What this report captures is something APPA members live every day. Facilities teams in higher education and K–12 are managing complex utility portfolios with lean staff and limited dedicated energy resources. While institutional leadership sees a simplified version of a problem that is anything but simple. That executive-to-practitioner confidence gap is real, and it's costly. The antidote is data: consistent benchmarking, tracking usage alongside spend, and the ability to translate operational performance into the language that earns institutional investment.”

Lalit Agarwal // President & CEO, APPA

 **EnergyCAP's take**

The same group who reported 100% confidence in meeting their energy management goals also reported 100% confidence in their budgets and described themselves as operating at the most advanced level of energy management strategy. These respondents were almost exclusively high-level executives. Individual contributors and managers across the board were more conservative in their confidence.

Why the disconnect? Executives are often farther from the day-to-day work, receive a filtered version of “bad” news, and see high-level updates, while teams on the ground live with the details.

Non-customers also cite both a lack of data and dedicated energy resources as top blockers, and list better forecasting as a top need, yet many of these same organizations report high confidence in meeting goals and budgets.

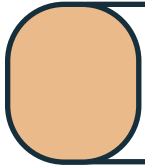
When you're far removed from the details of energy management, getting more insights out of your data can seem deceptively simple, but without a single source of truth that eliminates errors, surfaces insights, and translates utility data into cost-saving actions, making the leap from intention to results is extremely difficult.

Without the details and complexity uncovered by dedicated tools, energy management can look deceptively simple and achievable. Deeper involvement produces more nuanced, less absolute confidence, especially as teams with strong tools surface issues and launch projects. In that sense, lower confidence usually signals higher awareness: EnergyCAP customers feel more informed, even when they're less likely to claim 100% certainty.

If you know your team needs better tools to meet the goals set by leadership, speaking to executives in “their language” is the fastest path to getting the resources you need to effectively manage utilities.

Our advice:

- **Keep it business-first:** short, clear, and tied to organizational priorities
- **Lead with impact:** how you'll mitigate risks, maximize ROI, and save cost
- **Make the ask easy:** present clear scope, timeline, owners, with minimal disruption



Small teams and toolkits are taking on big goals

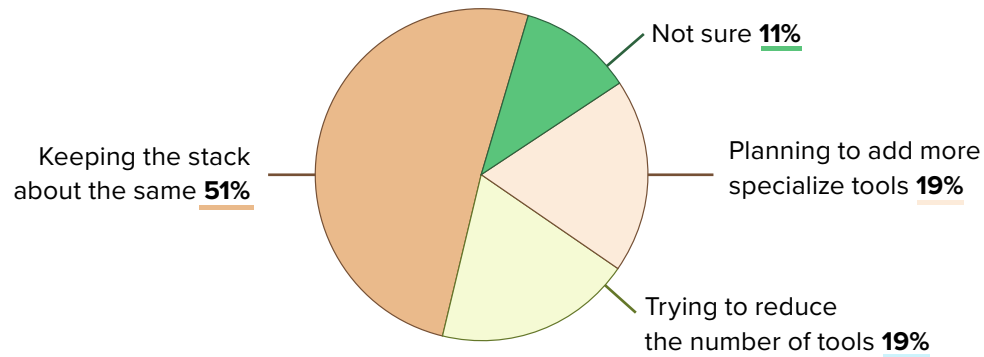


CHART 4 | Energy management toolset size changes

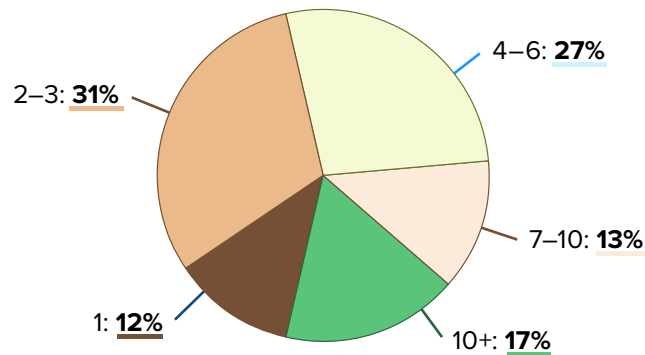


CHART 5 | Energy management team size (includes cross-team and part-time resources)

Key findings:

Most organizations are keeping their energy management toolset the same size heading into 2026.

1 in 5 plan to add a new tool this year.

1 in 10 rely on a single person as the lone energy resource.

EnergyCAP customers are **2.5x** more likely to have teams larger than 10.

70% report energy management teams with no more than 6 people.

Energy management teams are structurally lean. These small teams are simultaneously expected to control costs, reduce consumption, prove success to leadership, and keep data audit-ready, all while navigating tightening budgets and increasing complexity. It's no surprise that bandwidth shows up as a top blocker across both customers and non-customers, pointing to a structural constraint, not just a staffing issue.

Small teams still drive big outcomes when they rally around shared data and accessible insights. In practice, team growth and tool adoption tend to reinforce each other: once an organization commits to energy management as a program, the data becomes the uniting instrument that brings facilities, finance, and leadership into the work, often unlocking more resources over time.

“The increase in energy rates will also increase the need for energy managers, as well as the need to “schedule” loads so that utilities can have a more level generation profile and avoid racking up huge capital expenditures for new generation. The need for more cheap generation (renewables are a great option) along with energy storage is greater than ever.”

Eric Woodroof, Ph.D. // Founder, ProfitableGreenSolutions.com



EnergyCAP's take

EnergyCAP customers are 2.5× more likely to report energy teams of 10+, which signals what happens when teams have the tools to consistently uncover savings and prove results: momentum attracts resources. When a lone energy manager is stuck in spreadsheets and manual utility work, visibility and bandwidth stay limited, so fewer projects get finished, fewer wins get documented, and teams stay small.

Our advice for teams navigating “do more with less”:

- **Make your current tools work harder.** Standardize workflows, invest in data quality, and reduce manual handoffs if you're unable to add to the stack.
- **Build a strong business case for the tools you need.** Tie your ask to budget variance impact, risks avoided, and measurable cost reduction.
- **Use data as the rally point.** Shared reporting and clear ownership pull cross-functional partners into the program.

Goals and blockers reveal the real divide: everyone wants cost control, but teams get stuck in different places

What are your top utility management goals for 2026?

(external responses)

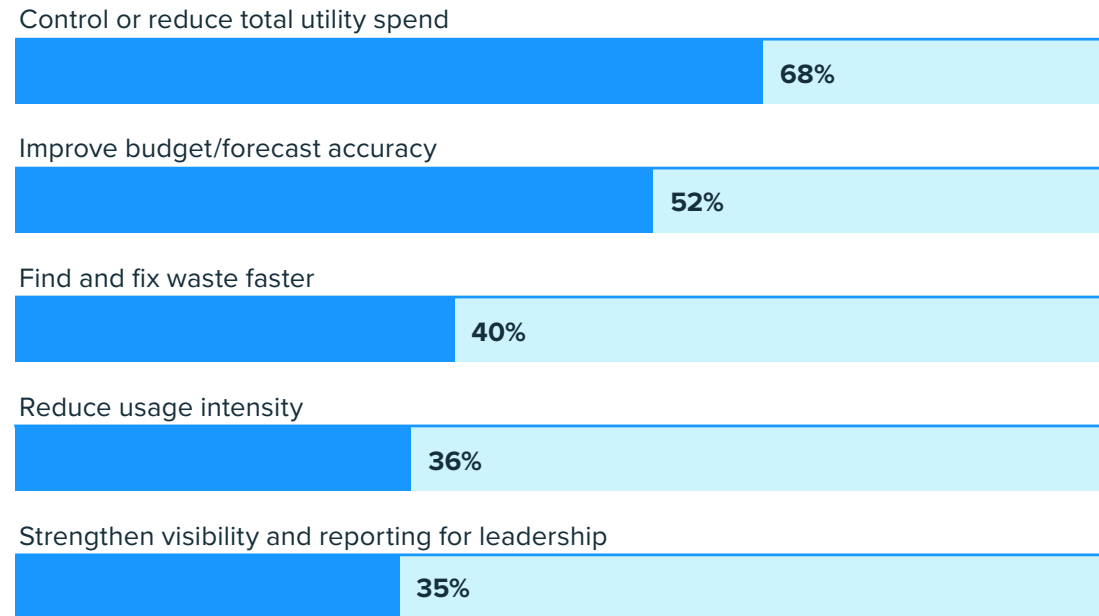


CHART 6 | External respondents top 5 2026 utility management goals

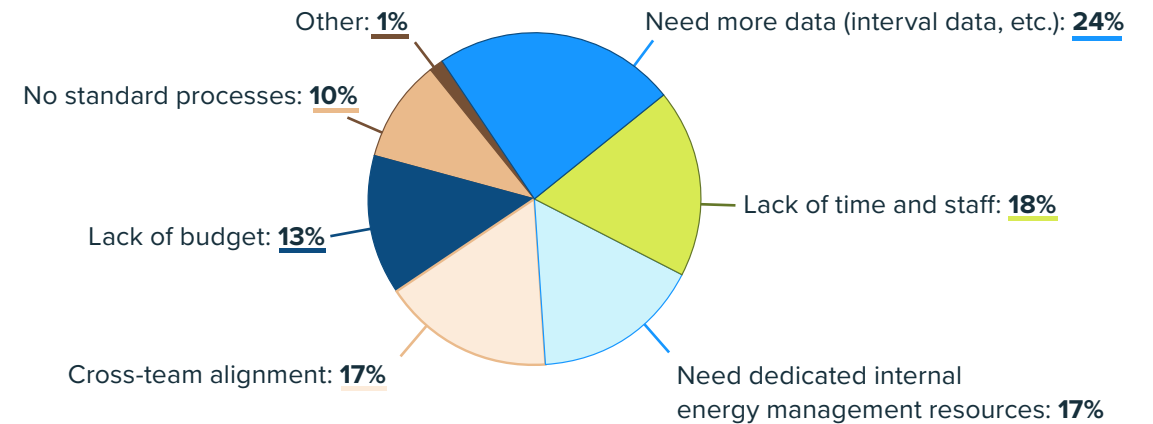


CHART 7 | External respondents blockers to achieving energy management goals

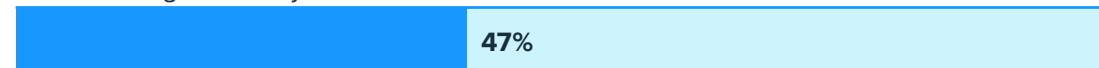
What are your top utility management goals for 2026?

(customer responses)

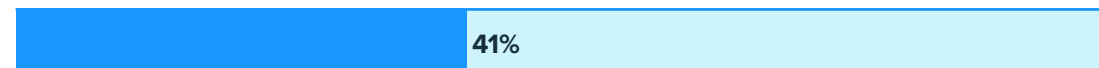
Control or reduce total utility spend



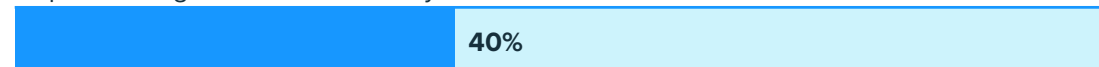
Reduce usage intensity



Find and fix waste faster



Improve budget/forecast accuracy



Improve billing accuracy and reduce rework

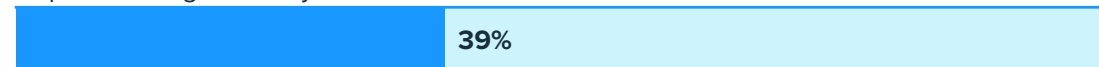


CHART 8 | Customer top 5 2026 utility management goals

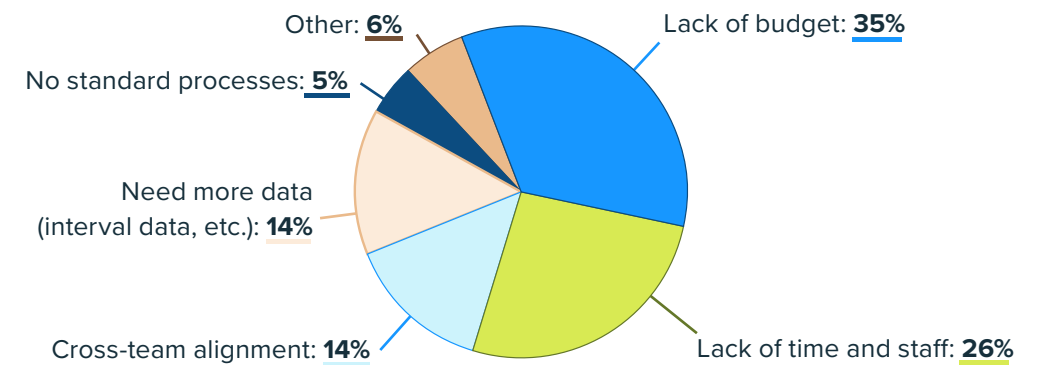


CHART 9 | Customer blockers to achieving energy management goals

Key findings:

Top goals

- ▲ **EnergyCAP customers prioritize the key metric in reducing consumption and cost, intensity/EUI reduction, at 4x the rate of non-customers.**
- ▲ **Controlling or reducing utility spend ranks as the #1 goal across both EnergyCAP customers and non-customers**
- ▲ **“Find and fix waste faster” is a top-three goal for everyone**
- ▲ **From there, priorities split: non-customers need better forecasting and leadership visibility, while EnergyCAP customers prioritize metrics that surface the biggest drivers of consumption and cost**

Blockers

- ▼ **Bandwidth constraints show up as a top-three blocker for everyone, along with cross-team alignment farther down**
- ▼ **Customers prioritize budget needs for the ECMs they want to pursue**
- ▼ **External respondents need the basics: more and better data, and dedicated internal energy management resources to launch or run their program**

In 2026, the headline stays consistent: cost control sits at the center of energy management for everyone. “Find and fix waste faster” also lands near the top across the board, signaling a shift toward continuous performance management.

After those shared priorities, the paths diverge. Non-customers lean into forecasting and leadership visibility, which points to a foundational need: defensible numbers and clearer reporting to support budgets and planning. EnergyCAP customers prioritize the metrics that identify the biggest drivers of consumption and cost, especially EUI/use intensity, suggesting they’re further along in translating data into outcomes and targets.

Blockers mirror that split. Bandwidth hits everyone, but the “why” differs: customers often know what to fix next and get stalled at budget approval for ECMs, while external respondents are still building the foundation—more complete data and dedicated internal resources to run the program at all.

 **EnergyCAP's take**

This is the big reveal: both customers and non-customers want similar outcomes, but they're solving different problems. External organizations are working to get the basics right; customers are working to scale impact.

Our advice:

- **Start where the friction is greatest.** If forecasting is the blocker, centralize and validate the data behind the budget; if execution is the blocker, narrow focus to the highest-impact projects and standardize the workflow to deliver them.
- **Make leadership reporting a bridge, not a finish line:** Visibility earns attention, but outcomes earn investment
- **Translate goals into an operating plan.** Top 3 goals, top 3 blockers, and the top investment that will remove the most friction (time, staff, or tools)



My industry experience has taught me that rallying support to solve complicated energy efficiency problems is very challenging and time consuming. Don't waste your time fighting the data. Use good tools to organize the data and gather insights so you can spend your personal energy on making change in your organization."

Thomas Diliberti CEM, CMVP, CIAQP, CLEP

// Sr Manager, Energy & Utility Solutions, EnergyCAP

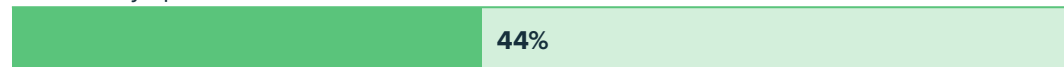
Measures of success: The best programs track dollars and kWh

How is success measured for utility management today?

Usage (kWh/therms/water)



Total utility spend



Spend vs budget variance



EUI / normalized intensity



Verified savings from projects



CHART 10 | Customer top 5 measure of success

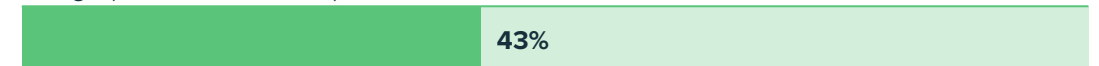
Spend vs budget variance



Total utility spend



Usage (kWh/therms/water)



Forecast accuracy



Billing accuracy/error rate



CHART 11 | External top 5 measure of success

Key findings:

The top 3

responses across the board include **Usage, Total Utility Spend, and Spend Vs Budget Variance**

Across both groups, the same three KPIs rise to the top: Usage, Total Utility Spend, and Spend vs. Budget variance, just in a different order. From there, the scorecards diverge. EnergyCAP customers track a broader mix that includes benchmarking and project performance, while non-customers stay largely finance-first.

That split signals opportunity on both sides. Financial metrics communicate outcomes and risk in the language leadership expects. On the other hand, usage and benchmarking metrics explain why costs move and reveal the operational levers that actually control utility costs—the #1 energy management goal this year.



EnergyCAP's take

Our CEO often talks about the “dollars and kWh” on the utility bill. Both matter. Teams that treat energy as only a finance program miss the biggest levers for cost control: reducing consumption, finding errors, and managing loads. Teams that treat it as only an energy program struggle to earn buy-in, because leadership lives in budgets, variance, and ROI.

Our advice:

- **Track both dollars and kWh:** Pair spend metrics with usage, demand, and benchmarking so you can explain variance and prove progress
- **Report like a program, not a bill.** Use EUI trends and M&V to show improvement
- **Speak leadership KPIs.** Lead with budget impact, risk, and ROI, then connect those outcomes back to the operational drivers that produced them

In conclusion: Finding your tribe



Rising utility costs, lean teams, and mixed budget confidence are forcing a shift: energy management gets measured by financial outcomes, but the biggest levers still show up in usage and performance. One of the fastest ways to make progress in a volatile year is to build your tribe: peers, mentors, and communities that share what's working, pressure-test plans, and help you earn internal buy-in. The strongest programs connect dollars and kWh, and they don't do it alone.

These are some of our favorites:

- **Eco Champions.** EnergyCAP's free community, for customers and non-customers alike, for peer sharing, idea exchange, mentorship, practical advice, and training
- **APPA.** Robust Higher-ed facilities network focused on campus operations, utilities, and best-practice exchange. Connect with peers at every level, learn through training online and in-person classes, and join a regional group for tailored connections and local events
- **IDEA.** District energy community for technical guidance, benchmarking, and operator-to-operator insights
- **AEE.** Formal Energy Management certification and coursework, and a professional community for energy and facilities leaders

Resources

[Weather Data Depot](#)

Free utility data normalization support

[ENERGY STAR® Portfolio Manager®](#)

Free building benchmarking

[ENERGY STAR® Portfolio Manager® Data Explorer](#)

Compare against 150k+ buildings

[EnergyCAP Utility Bill Increase Calculator](#)

Free budget estimate tool

[EIA electricity price outlook](#)

Price trends and forecasts

[DOE data center/AI demand report](#)

Methodology



EnergyCAP and Centiment gathered data for this report by surveying 202 individual contributors, managers, directors, and c-suite executives who are directly involved in or aware of their company’s energy management and budget strategy.

Individuals were either existing EnergyCAP customers, or worked in higher education with 5k+ students, state and local governments with 76k+ residents, healthcare with 5k+ employees, retail with 5k+ employees, or in the manufacturing, professional services, K–12 education, utilities, or transportation industries.

Data was collected between January 1st and February 18th, 2026. Survey data is unweighted, and the margin of error is approximately +/-6% with a 90% confidence level.

About EnergyCAP

EnergyCAP is expert-driven energy management software that centralizes utility bills, meter, commodity, and interval data in one platform, turning spreadsheet chaos into lower utility costs, massive time savings, and budget-focused emissions tracking. Built for energy, facilities, and finance teams, EnergyCAP keeps everyone in the same source of truth for reporting, cost control, and performance improvement. With 40+ years of experience, thousands of customers across government, higher education, and the private sector trust EnergyCAP to improve efficiency and operational performance.