Questions received from 2/8/18 LEAD Tool Webinar and 3/20/18 Q&A call:

Q: Is there a way to aggregate and refine LEAD tool data to customize it to a utility’s service territory? (Assuming the utility is not a municipal utility that overlaps with a city’s boundaries.)

A: Unfortunately not at this time. We are using census tract information and utility services territory can cover many parts of a different census tracts. To do this a person would need to capture which parts of a census tract falls into a utility service area. To try to map it yourself, check out DHS: Electric Retail Service Territories

Q: Any data here on energy costs/fuel types for master-metered multifamily buildings?

A: No, we assume that the energy expenditures for those housing units are the same as those of similar housing units which pay utility bills directly.

Q: Can you overlay other variables into this tool? For example, if I wanted to know about energy burdens for elderly renters in Rochester (or some other census tract), is it possible to get that granular?

A: It is possible to do this; however, there are no current plans to add this to the LEAD tool.

Q: Is it possible to calculate energy intensity? In $$ per square foot for different types of housing, tenure, etc.?

A: No, the American Community Survey data does not include square footage of housing units. This can be accomplished with the American Housing Survey. However, it would be a much higher level of aggregation, either the largest metropolitan statistical areas or census divisions.

Q: Methodology question: many utilities have fixed charges that appear on a customer’s bill irrespective of their energy use. Is this part of the rate structures that you looked it and are those inputs included reflected in the monthly expenditures?

A: Since we are looking at energy expenditures, rather than energy consumption, we use the ACS data directly without needing to consider the tariff structure. The expenditure data from ACS includes the full utility bill, including any fixed charges.

Q: Using Watauga County, NC as an example, the HEAG (Home Energy Affordability Gap) data for "less than 50% FPL" for Watauga Co. shows an average energy burden of 37.3% for 2016. But the LEAP tool from USDOE reports b/w 8% and 22% for the same income level (range due to owner v. renter, and the fact that it’s also broken up as 0-30% and 30-50%). Do you have any insight into the reason for the discrepancy b/w the two results? The data sources seem largely the same at first glance.

A: The calculations are conducted differently. We use AMI rather than FPL. Energy burden rises rapidly with declining household income for lower income households. As such, we would expect small differences in assumed definitions for low income to have large impacts to energy burden estimates.

Q: How would you use this tool to visualize and analyze data from multiple municipalities (e.g. county or state)?
A: The tool is not currently set up to do this type of comparison automatically. However, run the values for different counties and places and make the comparison. You could also open multiple files and do a side-by-side comparison.

Q: Are energy expenditures only building related or transportation too?

A: Only building related energy expenditures are considered.

To see how some cities are utilizing the LEAD tool, check out DOE Cities LEAP: From Data to Decisions Fact Sheets.