



National Community Solar Partnership

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Mission

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The Partnership's mission is to leverage the momentum in the public and private sector to expand solar access to new markets (demographic and geographic) and convene relevant stakeholders to assess market barriers and catalyze deployment in low- and moderate-income (LMI) communities. In order to help reach this goal, the [SunShot Initiative](#) launched the Solar in Your Community Challenge on November 18, 2016. [Learn more.](#)

Background

The National Community Solar Partnership aims to expand solar access to all Americans, with specific emphasis on serving LMI households. The Department of Energy (DOE) is leading the Partnership, in collaboration with the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), and the Department of Agriculture (USDA), bringing together key representatives from solar companies, non-profit organizations, state and community leaders, and financial institutions. The Partnership works on topics relevant to the overarching mission including: greater utilization of existing federal and state resources, sharing of best practices at the state level, development of new financing arrangements and business models, new approaches to customer acquisition and community building, and multifamily deployment considerations. The [White House announced](#) the Partnership on July 7, 2015.

The Partnership's goal is to help unlock community solar's potential for economic growth across the United States. A recent [DOE and NREL](#) report estimates that nearly 50% of consumers and businesses are unable to host photovoltaic (PV) systems due to a number of factors. These consumers and businesses include those that do not own their building (i.e., renters) and/or those that do not have access to sufficient roof space (e.g., high-rise buildings,

multi-unit housing, malls). [Shared solar](#) is one approach to expanding solar access to these customers, and could represent 32%–49% of the distributed PV market in 2020. This could lead to cumulative PV deployment growth of 5.5–11.0 GW by 2020, representing \$8.2–\$16.3 billion of investment. National Renewable Energy Laboratory’s (NREL’s) [Guide to Community Shared Solar](#) provides a framework for the development of this model for solar deployment in communities.

The White House [formally kicked off the partnership](#) at a meeting on November 17, 2015.

Working Groups

Finance and Business Models

This group researches the business models that successfully finance community and shared solar. The group examines de-risking LMI customer participation in shared solar, the role data sharing could play in reducing investor concerns, and which utility ownership models and incentive programs have been the most successful. In addition to developing case studies that articulate the financial challenges, this group plans to convene a meeting of philanthropic donors who could potentially fund pilot programs to demonstrate new business models for LMI communities.

Community Building

This group focuses on understanding customer acquisition methods to drive participation in shared solar. The group has been developing a tool that evaluates and scores the benefits of a community solar project for each key stakeholder involved, specifically targeting project developers, utilities, community-based organizations, project financiers, local policymakers, and academics. The ability for each stakeholder to understand the value of a project will improve transparency, communication, and inclusion in the project

development process, assist in the monitoring and evaluation of projects, and facilitate smarter regulatory processes.

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States Best Practices

This group delves into current state policies and regulations for community solar around the country. Through regular meetings and webinars, the group is looking to better understand how state policies enable shared solar and how do they differ from other states. They are also examining best practices and challenges associated with states expanding access to community solar, including how state policies have encouraged LMI participation in community solar. The group aims to compile the successes of several states.

Federal Resources

This group focuses on federal funding programs and explore how existing programs can support community solar. These programs span across several agencies including the Department of Housing and Urban Development, Department of Agriculture, Environmental Protection Agency, Department of Health and Human Services, and Department of Energy. This group is compiling the successes of entities that have successfully used federal funds to develop community solar projects. [View a list of federal resources.](#)

Partnership Members as of September 12, 2016

Federal/State/Tribal Gov't Organizations

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Academia

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NC Clean Energy Technology Center at North Carolina State University -

Raleigh, NC

University of Houston - Houston, TX

University of Maine - Orono, ME

University of Minnesota - Minneapolis, MN

Utility

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Nonprofit

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Binghamton Regional Sustainability Coalition - Binghamton, NY

Black Rock Solar - San Francisco, CA

Bonneville Environmental Foundation - Portland, OR

Boston Community Capital - Boston, MA

Center for Resource Solutions - San Francisco, CA

Center for Sustainable Communities - Atlanta, GA

Clean Energy Economy Minnesota - Minneapolis, MN

Clean Energy States Alliance - Montpelier, VT

Coalition for Community Solar Access - Washington, DC

Community Housing Works - San Diego, CA

Community Power Network - Washington, DC

Community Purchasing Alliance - Washington, DC

Community Shared Renewable Energy, NY Energy Democracy Alliance - New York (statewide)

Cooperative Community Energy - San Rafael, CA

Co-op Power - Hyde Park, MA

Ecolibrium3 - Duluth, MN

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Elevate Energy - Chicago, IL

Energy Alabama - Madison, AL

Energy Outreach Colorado - Denver, CO

Energy Solidarity Cooperative - Oakland, CA

Environment Georgia - Decatur, GA

Environmental Law and Policy Center - Chicago, IL

Fresh Energy - St. Paul, MN

Global Green USA - Santa Monica, CA

Great Plains Institute - Minneapolis, MN

Greater Cincinnati Energy Alliance - Cincinnati, OH

GRID Alternatives - Oakland, CA

Groundswell - Washington, DC

ICAST - Lakewood, CO

Institute for Sustainable Communities - Montpelier, VT

Interstate Renewable Energy Council - Latham, NY

Metropolitan Area Planning Council - Boston, MA

Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments - Washington, DC

Michigan Energy Options - Marquette, MI

Microgrid Institute - Little Falls, MN

Minnesota Renewable Energy Society - Minneapolis, MN

Monadnock Sustainability Network - Spofford, NH

National League of Cities - Washington, DC

Nebraskans for Solar - Omaha, NE

Neighborhood Sun - Silver Spring, MD

Northern Virginia Regional Commission - Fairfax, VA

Northwest SEED - Seattle, WA

RE-volv - San Francisco, CA

Rocky Mountain Institute - Boulder, CO

Rural Communities Housing Development Corporation - Ukiah, CA

Rural Renewable Energy Alliance - Pine River, MN

Solar Electric Power Association - Washington, DC

Solar Energy Industries Association - Washington, DC

Solar Gardens Institute - Westminster, CO

SolarOne - New York, NY

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Solarize NOVA - Fairfax, VA

Solstice Initiative - Boston, MA

Sun Valley Institute for Resilience - Ketchum, ID

TegDB - Richmond, TX

The Solar Foundation - Washington, DC

Utah Clean Energy - Salt Lake City, UT

Vermont Energy Investment Corporation - Burlington, VT

Vote Solar - Washington, DC

Industry

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If you are interested in learning more about the Partnership activities, send an email to solar.community@ee.doe.gov.

Key Impacts

Knowledge transfer

- As a fledgling approach to solar deployment, community solar has much to gain from open collaboration and identification of new markets and opportunities
- The partnership facilitates information and best practice sharing between the community solar industry's leading players as well as governmental organizations, financial institutions, and nonprofits, with special attention given to common challenges and expansion to new solar markets (both geographies and customer segments)
- National Labs and other DOE partners conduct important solar research, which could benefit partners and the community solar industry as a whole

Low and Moderate Income (LMI) Households

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- Despite the fact that LMI households have the most to gain from installing solar—electricity costs make up a larger fraction of their budgets as compared with more affluent households—LMI households have seen far less solar penetration than their wealthy counterparts
- Historical solar business models required homeownership, a suitable roof, and good credit ratings, while much of the LMI community are renters living in multifamily units with limited access to capital

Events and Workshops

The Partnership held four regional workshops in Denver, Atlanta, Boston, and Minneapolis in 2016 to help participants identify strategies to catalyze community solar projects and engage low and moderate income households in specific regions. Workshops featured national experts, state and local officials, industry representatives, utility providers, environmental justice advocates, and other key players who shared success stories, discussed common challenges and goals, and offered troubleshooting advice.

Additional Resources

- [Learn more about what the Energy Department is doing to promote the growth of community solar](#)
- [IREC Report: Shared Renewable Energy for Low-to Moderate-Income Consumers: Policy Guidelines and Model Provisions](#)
- [NREL Report: “Shared Solar: Current Landscape, Market Potential, and the Impact of Federal Securities Regulation”](#)
- [Press Release from April 27, 2015: NREL Report Estimates Market Potential of Shared Solar and Discusses Relevant Securities Regulations](#)

- [Blog Post from April 28, 2015: NREL Report Shows Big Potential for the Future of Shared Solar](#) **SOLAR POWERING AMERICA**
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- [Blog Post from January 29, 2015: No Roof, No Problem: Shared Solar Programs Make Solar Possible For You](#)
 - [Blog Post from January 31, 2014: Shared Solar Projects Powering Households Throughout America](#)
 - [The Solarize Guidebook: A Community Guide to Collective Purchasing of Residential PV Systems](#)
 - [A Guide to Community Shared Solar: Utility, Private, and Nonprofit Project Development](#)
 - [Shared Renewables Headquarters](#)
 - [IREC's Shared Solar Program Catalog](#)
 - [IREC's Model Rules for Shared Renewable Energy Programs](#)

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FEDERAL GOVERNMENT

The White House

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Open Gov • Accessibility • Data & Developer Tools