

## *Creating and Implementing Your Community Solar Plan*

A COMMUNITY SOLAR PROJECT BUILDS OR STRENGTHENS COMMUNITY while harnessing a renewable energy source. Creating and implementing a community solar project plan serves these synergistic goals - merely putting a solar system on a building is not enough. The decision-making process and action steps must involve community members, strengthen relationships and the mission of your organization or group, and leave your community as an advocate for the stewardship and sustainability offered by renewable energy.

### **How do we create a community solar project?**

Each community organization is unique. But the pattern of decisions and actions for a community solar project is common across communities. The pattern of decisions includes the following:

- Organizational decisions
- Motivational decisions
- Physical decisions
- Financial decisions
- Reward decisions

### **Organizational decisions**

Every organization has a unique decision-making structure, both formal and informal, and individuals who are key to making decisions. Community groups must decide who needs to be on board with the project in order for the project to proceed. An ad hoc organization to put a solar system on Old Man River Café has a decision-making structure, as does a public school that needs to bring a sometimes distant and disinterested central administration into the decision. Critical questions include: who needs to be informed, who must sign off, and who must become an advocate for the project, in order for the project to succeed.

### **Motivational decisions**

A community solar project needs to build community along with a solar system. How does a community solar project serve your organization's mission? The plan needs to identify why people from your community should be motivated to participate, to fund, and to become advocates for solar energy. The rationale for the project needs to find the links between why people





are part of your community or organization, and the benefits of solar energy.

### Physical decisions

The group must assess and decide how solar fits into the community's physical site, and what kinds of technology work best for your community's needs. While physical decisions are sometimes the most mystifying for people, physical decisions are ultimately the easiest to make - many decisions can be reduced to factual research about the solar resource, or where a solar system could be best sited. Included, however, among the physical decisions is how to address aesthetic concerns of community members, a decision that should not be dismissed as insignificant.

### Financial decisions

How does a community fund or finance its solar investment? Some financial choices will be driven by the type of community or organization, such as if the organization has tax exempt status or if the solar facility is part of a private business. Other choices are driven by resources - can the community raise funds up front or does the community need to finance the project? Even if community financial participation is unnecessary or deemed to be more trouble than other funding mechanisms, finding a way for community members to put up their money goes a long way toward creating solar advocates.

### Reward decisions

Once the project is up and running, the project leaders must claim credit and give credit in order to continue to build the community aspect of the solar project. The project should include a plan to remind community members of their ownership and success. What means can the community or organization use to remind people of their ongoing participation in stewardship, self-sufficiency, and in creating environmental benefits?

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