



Southern Tier Solar Works
Binghamton Regional Sustainability Coalition
PO Box 907, Binghamton, NY 13902
607-873-9220
Binghamtonsustainability.org
Southerntiersolarworks.org
Facebook.com/STSWNY



Sustainable Funding for Clean Energy Community Education and Outreach: A Critical and Under-resourced Piece of the Clean Energy Puzzle

A rapid transition to clean energy stands or falls by our capacity to quickly mainstream. Research has shown that effective clean energy policies and programs require four key elements: viable technology, accessible financing, a trained and reliable workforce, and market demand. Effective community-based clean energy education and outreach (henceforth, community energy (CE)) has been demonstrated to be the most cost effective method for expanding the clean energy market beyond the early adopters into the mainstream, particularly for moderate and low income consumers, and for challenging segments, such as leased and rented buildings. Yet demand for funding locally-based CE goes begging, even though it is easily the least costly of the four. The reasons of this are complex, go far beyond the clean energy sector and are beyond the scope of this proposal.

How to solve this problem? Non-profit market expansion provides value that contractors, mass marketing and government cannot. Community organizations have deep local knowledge based in particular communities and social networks, which informs what practices are likely to be most successful. They also enjoy a level of trust that is critical to success, since contractors and the public sector are frequently perceived as having material interests that conflict with those of the clientele. The funding stream should reinforce and not undermine these strengths. CE programs should be funded largely by those that receive this value - contractors, the public, and funders and investors with clean energy missions and objectives.

CE delivers value to contractors by turning social networks of trust into incipient markets and delivering pre-screened leads which would cost many times more through other marketing channels. In order to 'tax' contractors for this value without making it pay-for-play requires an intermediary. This could be through a contractor fee scaled by company size using an industry association or a public sector agency as a pass-through.

Foundations and investors that seek to accelerate the transition have a special role to play. They can make strategic and agile decisions in ways that the public sector usually cannot. CE best practices, sensitive to differences in locality, are out there. What is absent is a significant commitment of capital and investment to local and regional CE partnerships. The value provided can be calculated as a standard percentage of CE mediated energy projects – say 5-20% - just as overhead and administration are.

Lastly, the proxy for the public for this purpose is the state, and in our case, agencies funded through the System Benefits Charge/RPS and RGGI. In so far as the state has a vested interest in the multiple benefits of clean energy, the state should take seriously the funding of community energy outreach in ways it has failed to do hitherto. A carve-out from RGGI & the SBC should be instituted for the express purpose of market expansion through CE. In New York, programs such as Green Jobs Green NY should be expanded to other renewables. Funding should be much longer term, and performance payments should be icing on the cake, not critical operational funds. Further, funding should not be so miserly relative to that provided to technologists, contractors, and other specialists. You get what you pay for, and the parsimonious short term funding of CE thus far undermines our ability to rapidly reach common goals.

A note on where resources should be focused. The strategy should be to prioritize regions outside the coastal and deep blue-state regions that teem with early adopters, while working in those latter communities to test what works in moving to the next level. By driving demand for clean technologies in low- and moderate-income communities outside of deep blue regions, and most particularly those in the traditional coal, oil and gas regions, green jobs can displace dirty and dangerous ones, and change the political facts on the ground that have helped maintain dysfunctional federal policies as regards energy and climate

The value of CE has already been amply demonstrated. Lets move rapidly to make a meaningful financial commitment to what works. The best way to refine and extend existing best practices is to provide sustainable funding so that program managers can focus at the job at hand – making a transition to clean energy while there is still time.

Comments and action are welcome. Contact Adam Flint, Southern Tier Solar Works Program Manager, 607-761-8337, flint@igc.org