



Community Solar NY Round 2 – Solarize Campaigns Launching in Spring 2016

Frequently Asked Questions

Q: What is Community Solar NY?

A: Community Solar NY is an initiative under NY-Sun to make solar easier and more affordable through community-driven initiatives.

Q: What is Solarize?

A: A Solarize campaign is a short term (approximately 6-9 months, including planning and outreach), local effort that brings together groups of potential solar customers through widespread outreach and education. This model helps customers choose a solar installation company that is offering competitive, transparent pricing. In 2015, NYSERDA supported Solarize campaigns in more than thirty communities around the state. In spring 2016, NYSERDA will be supporting a second round of local Solarize campaigns by providing marketing materials, funding and technical assistance for qualifying campaigns.

Q: What is shared solar?

A: Shared solar (also referred to as community shared solar or community distributed generation) provides opportunities for renters, homeowners, low-income residents, schools, and businesses to join together to set up a shared solar project resulting in healthier and stronger communities and solar for all. Each individual member's production will appear as a credit on their monthly utility bill. The first phase of the program will focus on promoting low-income customer participation and installations in areas of the power grid that can benefit most from local power production.

Q: What is the Affordable Solar program?

A: The Affordable Solar program improves access to solar for low-to-moderate income households across New York. The first component of this program, additional financial incentives through NY-Sun for low-to-moderate income homeowners installing solar on their residences, launches in October 2015.

Application Process, Eligibility, and Qualifications

Q: When can I apply for Solarize? How can I tell if my community is ready to Solarize?

A: The application for NYSERDA support for Solarize campaigns launching in spring 2016 (Community Solar NY Round 2) is currently open, and will close on November 16th, 2015 at 5 pm.

Solarize campaigns are generally successful when there is strong commitment from local partners and a great deal of interest from community members in solar. The Community Solar NY webpage (www.ny-sun.ny.gov/community-solar) features a set of resources, including the Community Solar NY Resource Guidebook, program qualifications, and examples of recent Solarize campaigns in New York, that will help you determine whether your campaign and community are ready.

Q: My community participated in Community Solar NY Round 1, can we apply for Round 2?

A: Yes, but communities are encouraged to build on their experience to include a broader range of participants, such as small businesses and/or households eligible for the Affordable Solar program.

Q: My town wants to do a Solarize campaign this spring, but we won't have a meeting to officially approve the project and Letter of Commitment until December. Can we still apply?

A: Yes. In your application please include all information about the local government's role, as well as documentation from a town official explaining that the town's participation is pending the meeting/vote. A copy of the draft Letter of Commitment which can be found on ny-sun.ny.gov/community-solar would be the strongest documentation. Final approval of the application by NYSERDA would be contingent upon the town's final decision.

Q: Does a lead organization have to pay into the Systems Benefits Charge (SBC) in order to be an eligible applicant?

A: No.

Q: Is there a specific level of local government that is considered a community (town, county, village, etc)?

A: All levels of local government are eligible applicants, but individual campaigns are limited to areas with a population of 100,000 or less.

Q: If a community organization is the lead organization (applicant), do they need to be a registered 501c3 entity in order to be eligible?

A: No. The lead organization however must be incorporated in some manner in order to contract and receive funding from NYSERDA.

Q: Does the primary contact and/or core team need to be employees of the lead organization?

A: No.

Q: If multiple community campaigns are working together in a regional effort, does each local campaign need to submit an application, or can one joint application be submitted?

A: A separate application must be submitted for each potential Solarize campaign, with plans for any collaboration with other communities described in the application. Information that is consistent across all the communities that have agreed to collaborate can be repeated in each application. Please note that each application must demonstrate that the specific applicants and the planned local campaign meet the program eligibility requirements and qualifications.

Q: What defines a region?

A: Generally, NYSERDA uses the Regional Economic Development Council definitions of NY's regions: <http://regionalcouncils.ny.gov/map> . However, Solarize campaigns may choose to collaborate in groups that cover only a portion of a region.

Q: What should be included in the Letters of Commitment from the lead organization and partners?

A: The Letters of Commitment found on the NY-Sun site, ny-sun.ny.gov/community-solar should include as many specific details as possible about the partner's role, and a clear commitment to do outreach to members/constituents. For example, local governments should be ready to publicly state support for the initiative, host events, and send information to constituents.

Q: Where can we find a copy of the Sample Agreement between NYSERDA and the lead organization of a Solarize campaign?

A: The Sample Agreement is available at www.ny-sun.ny.gov/community-solar.

Q: Is this program for off-grid or grid-tied solar electric installations?

A: Only grid-tied solar installations are eligible for NY-Sun incentives and inclusion in Solarize campaigns supported by NYSERDA.

NYSERDA Funding and Support

Q: What can the NYSERDA funding be used for and how are campaign expenses defined?

A: The funding provided by NYSERDA is meant to support direct campaign expenses. These are costs directly related to the implementation of the Solarize campaign, such as printing materials, event costs, and staff time dedicated to the campaign.

Q: Can campaigns seek additional funding from other sources and still receive NYSERDA funding?

A: Yes. Communities are welcome to seek additional sources of funds for use on a Solarize campaign (for example, from the municipality or a local foundation).

Q: Can communities work with area's Economic Development Growth Extension (EDGE) representative or Climate Smart Communities Coordinator on their campaigns?

A: Yes, communities may work with existing NYSERDA partners and representatives such as EDGE and Climate Smart Communities.

Q: What marketing and technical assistance will NYSERDA provide?

A: NYSERDA and its partners will provide technical and marketing assistance to Solarize campaigns supported through Community Solar NY. Communities will be provided with template marketing and outreach materials such as yard signs, banners, fliers, press releases, presentations, website materials, and social media tips, as well as planning and guidance on their use. NYSERDA will have regular calls with participating communities to ensure that campaigns are on track and provide additional assistance as needed.

Q: What kind of legal advice or support can NYSERDA provide?

A: NYSERDA cannot act as legal counsel to any community. The materials and templates that NYSERDA will provide for Solarize campaigns have, where relevant, been reviewed by NYSERDA legal staff and incorporate best practices from successful solar aggregation programs.

Q: What assistance will NYSERDA provide through the installer selection process?

A: NYSERDA and its partners will provide technical assistance to communities throughout the solar installer selection process. This includes a template Request for Proposal (RFP) as well as guidelines and facilitation for the selection process. The selection committee representing each community will be provided with factual information about the solar market in your area to help you compare and evaluate proposals. The community representatives will be responsible for making the installer selection decision.

In addition, only eligible solar contractors in the NYSERDA NY-Sun Incentive Program that have gone through our pre-qualification process will be able to take part in Solarize campaigns. A description of what makes a contractor eligible to participate can be found in the Community Solar NY template request for proposal. These installers have current Participation Agreements with NYSERDA, and are subject to the program's credential, insurance, and Quality Assurance requirements. NY-Sun Participating Installer requirements can be found at <http://ny-sun.ny.gov/For-Installers/Eligibility-and-Training> .

Q: Do communities have to use tiered discounts described in the Intro to Solarize webinar?

A: This approach has generally been met with success in previous Solarize campaigns. However, participating communities may propose alternative approaches to this or other parts of the installer RFP to meet local needs, subject to NYSERDA approval.

Q: Can the Solarize campaign include an option to either purchase or lease a PV system?

A: Yes. Almost all recent Solarize campaigns have included both purchase and lease/PPA options.