

Community Solar NY Round 1- Solarize Campaigns Launching in Spring 2015

Frequently Asked Questions

January 8, 2015

Q: What is Community Solar NY?

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

Q: What is Solarize?

A: Solarize 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 will be supporting local Solarize campaigns by providing marketing materials and technical assistance for qualifying campaigns, as well as funding for campaign expenses.

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 2015 (Community Solar NY Round 1) is currently open, and will close on January 30th, 2015 at 5 pm. Applications will be accepted until that time.

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) includes a set of resources, including the Intro to Solarize webinar, program qualifications, and examples of recent Solarize campaigns in New York, that should help you determine whether your campaign and community are ready. We also recommend preliminary outreach to community members to gauge interest, and have attached a sample survey at the end of the FAQs.

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 February. 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 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.

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

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 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: Can you give us an example of a survey to gauge community interest?

A: Yes, an example using questions from recent Solarize campaigns is attached. Preliminary outreach can take the form of a meeting, an email to an existing list or group, or other activity to gauge the early level of interest in Solarize. This kind of preliminary outreach has helped recent Solarize campaigns have a starting point from which to build interest once they officially start the campaign.

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/-/media/NYSun/files/solarize-agreement-sample.pdf and is also linked from the Program Summary document. All program information is available at www.ny-sun.ny.gov/community-solar.

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: 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 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 representative 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 posts, 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. However, 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. Past campaigns have typically included language in RFPs, customer sign up forms, and other documents meant to protect the organizers. The Indemnification section of the recent Solarize Westchester solar installer RFP is provided below as an example (full RFP can be downloaded at www.solarizewestchester.com).

In addition, only eligible solar contractors in good standing in the NYSERDA NY-Sun Incentive Program will be able to take part in Solarize campaigns. 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: 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.

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.

Sample Preliminary Outreach Survey for Community Members

1. Are you interested in finding out more about go solar as part of a community-wide solar purchasing ("Solarize") project?
 - Yes
 - No
 - Possibly

2. What is your level of interest?
 - Very interested in getting a system installed
 - Interested but want more information
 - Not for my house, but I want to help the Solarize Campaign

3. How important is pricing to you in deciding to participate in Solarize?
 - Very Important
 - Somewhat Important
 - Not at All Important

4. How important to you that there are financing and leasing options available?
 - Very Important
 - Somewhat Important
 - Not at All Important

5. How important is having a local installer and or locally manufactured equipment available?
 - Very Important
 - Somewhat Important
 - Not at All Important

6. Would you be interested in helping to promote Solarize (_____) whether or not you participate yourself? If 'Yes' please give us your contact information below.
 - Yes
 - No
 - Maybe

7. How did you hear about Solarize (_____)
 - Newspaper articles
 - Internet, email
 - Facebook
 - Friends, and/or neighbors
 - Other

OPTIONAL: Your thoughts & comments are appreciated: