

PV Cities Training Program Powers Solar Adoption across America's Cities and Counties

Courtesy of NREL



Across the country, demand for solar energy is rising. Not only are more and more homeowners installing solar systems on their roofs, but cities and towns of all sizes are increasingly turning to solar power to stabilize growing energy costs. Large cities like Los Angeles, San Diego, and Honolulu are leading the charge in solar power generation. But for smaller cities and counties that are eager to incorporate solar energy into their plans, technical, financial, and/or policy limitations can slow or even stop such projects.

NREL Launches Online City and County Solar Training Program

As a world-leading advanced energy research laboratory, the U.S. Department of Energy's National Renewable Energy Laboratory (NREL) has the staff, tools, and capabilities to help cities and counties overcome solar adoption challenges. To aid cities in solar adoption, NREL launched the City and County Solar Photovoltaics Training Program, or PV Cities, in January. The five-month program was designed specifically for cities and counties and aimed to increase the deployment of mid-scale solar photovoltaic (PV) systems by engaging stakeholders to develop deployment solutions and empowering city and county staff.

"When it comes to commercial solar projects, needs are not the same across stakeholder groups," said Jenny Heeter, a senior energy analyst at NREL. "We were excited to launch this

training that meets the specific needs of city and county staff."

The online course, which ran from January to May and included 57 cities and counties from across the country, gave participants tools, knowledge, resources, and access to experts needed to deploy solar PV systems. The program comprised a five-step, iterative course, which walked city and county staff through the process of identifying solar sites, through the nuances of understanding appropriate funding vehicles, and finally to issuing a request for proposals (RFPs) from solar installers.

The five training modules are currently available online at no cost and include goal setting and clarification; screening and identifying PV projects; detailed site evaluation, project validation, and permitting; project financing, policy, and incentives; and deciding on a financing approach and beginning PV procurement.

Cities and Counties Implement What They Learned

Phase one of the training course wrapped up in May and participants have been making progress in their local communities ever since. Most members have completed site assessments and started their financial analysis.

"With the NREL training we were able to move our multiple solar projects from the idea phase to the financing stage," said one participant from Pennsylvania.

In particular, the financing and procurement trainings resonated with many participants.

"When preparing requests for solar project proposals, it is often the first time a city or county has submitted such a request," said Heeter. "Our template solar RFP, which is included in the training, has helped sustainability,



Rooftops are one way to bring solar to cities and counties.

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energy, and contracting experts streamline their solar procurement process.”

Since completing the training earlier this year, Henrico County, Virginia; Columbia, South Carolina; and Urbana, Illinois, have entered the procurement phase and are issuing, or soon to issue, RFPs, or are currently in negotiations with a developer.

“We are in touch with all of our participants, who are working hard to bring solar to their cities and counties, and we expect more to be in the procurement phase as proposals are presented and approved by city councils and mayors,” said Heeter.

Pay-it-Forward Phase Shares the Knowledge

As the more than 120 initial applications received for the program demonstrate,

interest in solar adoption by cities and counties is strong and growing. An increasing number of corporations and U.S. state and local governments have announced renewable energy commitments and the demand for insight on meeting these new commitments is increasing. To help others meet their solar energy goals, cities and counties that participated in the training program promised to mentor other governments.

“Over the next five months, phase two of our program begins and our participants will be reaching out to their counterparts in other cities and counties to share their lessons learned,” said Heeter. “Our new, local experts are best positioned to help others in their solar adoption quest.”

In addition to local outreach, the entire training program is available online for

anyone to reference. While originally designed for use by cities and counties, this commercial-scale solar training is applicable to non-government organizations and businesses as well. Other programs—such as SolSmart and the STAT Program—can aid in solar adoption. Additionally, NREL staff can assess specific needs on a contract basis.

“It’s rewarding to see how NREL expertise can help cities and counties move their solar projects and proposals forward,” said Heeter. “We love hearing about new projects breaking ground.” ■