

# How the Obama Administration Supported the Growth of Community Solar Through Partnerships, Initiatives, and Challenges



by Rebecca Langton,  
Clean Energy Collective



Rebecca Langton is a member of the Corporate Development team at Clean Energy Collective where she creates and directs content for Community Solar Hub, a platform created in partnership with the U.S. Department of Energy's Sun-Shot Initiative, and designed to increase the adoption and awareness of community solar programs nationwide. CEC is an industry leader in developing community-shared solar facilities for solar developers, electric utilities, and their customers. [Rebecca.langton@easycleanenergy.com](mailto:Rebecca.langton@easycleanenergy.com)

In November 2015, representatives from 68 companies, organizations, and universities gathered together in a sun-filled room at the White House to talk about solar. The agenda included a discussion of how to advance community solar and scale up solar for low- and moderate-income households. They shared ideas and best practices. At the end of the session, these leaders returned to their businesses located across the country ready to implement these ideas into their own projects. This meeting's purpose was to encourage industry professionals to share what works in their daily processes in order for more community solar to be successfully deployed across the U.S. This collaborative effort is called the National Community Solar Partnership, and was created by the Obama administration.

During the past eight years, the Obama administration made the growth of the solar energy industry and other renewables a priority by establishing multiple partnerships and initiatives that encouraged industry growth and autonomy. Solar energy is and always should be a bipartisan topic. It appeals to people on both sides of the aisle with financial savings being a motivator in addition to environmental benefits. Because of concerted efforts of this administration, multiple working groups were created to advance the solar industry, making solar more accessible to everyone.

Those eight years were a very busy time filled with clean energy efforts. As a result, solar professionals can point to many initiatives designed to support and bolster the industry. The National Community Solar Partnership was established in mid-2015 aimed at increasing access to solar energy for all Americans. This group of solar professionals,

financiers, and educators set a goal to install 300 MW of solar energy in federally subsidized housing. Another effort called The Clean Energy Savings for All initiative, established in early 2016, looks to promote innovative financing mechanisms, drive technical assistance, and scale up workforce training with a goal of bringing 1 GW of solar to low- and moderate-income families by 2020.

There are many more examples of the administration's support for the growth of renewable energy industries. In August 2015, President Obama announced at the National Clean Energy Summit how distributed energy projects would be supported by an additional \$1 billion in loan guarantees through the Loan Programs Office. This \$1 billion was in addition to the \$16 billion that had been distributed to renewable energy projects between 2009 and 2011. The Loan Programs Office, the office within the Department of Energy supporting these loan guarantees, identified distributed energy projects as the driving innovation force

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in U.S. energy markets.

As part of the Clean Energy Savings for All initiative, PACE (Property Assessed Clean Energy) financing is on track to be available for single-family housing in more states. Earlier this year the Department of Energy released an updated version of a 'best practice' guideline with the intention of helping states adopt and implement residential PACE programs. PACE is a program of innovative financing options for funding energy efficient and renewable energy upgrades in buildings via property tax bills. As of May 2016, nearly 100,000 homeowners have used PACE to make energy efficient improvements to their homes.

In 2012, the Administration made a commit-



ment to provide solar power to housing on over 40 military bases across the U.S. By 2014, a new 16.4 MW solar plant was built on the Davis-Monthan Air Force Base. The following year the U.S. Army completed installation of a 17.2 MW PV array that provides 25 percent of electricity for Fort Huachuca in Arizona. As of 2013, more than 130 MW of solar energy powered Navy, Army, and Air Force bases, affirming Obama's commitment to providing solar to more military households and facilities.

The administration also approved the construction of a new transmission line that supports bringing online a 485-megawatt PV facility in Riverside County, CA. This will produce power for more than 145,000 homes.

Early on in his administration, President Obama promised to have a PV solar array installed on the rooftop of the White House. The anticipated completion date came and went, but the array was eventually installed and celebrated with a ribbon cutting ceremony and a fair amount of social media discussion about the history of solar on the White House. This 6.3 kW PV solar system was installed on a portion of the White House as part of an overall energy retrofit.

Solar Ready Vets, a program offered through the SunShot Initiative, was established to train active military personnel to be good candidates for positions in management, PV installation, and sales, as well as technical positions. Launched in 2014, Solar Ready Vets is administered by The Solar Foundation and has a goal to train 75,000 in solar energy by 2020.

This article has listed several programs and initiatives that were put in place to encourage the adoption and growth of rooftop and community solar, but if efforts to curb climate change were also included, the list would be much longer. All in all, the Obama administration put a great deal of effort into raising awareness of climate change issues and

how the wider adoption of renewable energy could help limit its progression.

Overall, the U.S. solar energy capacity has grown thirtyfold since Obama took office. Community solar will continue to grow due to the efforts put in place through challenges, initiatives, and best practice guides. Right now, the DOE is developing a Community Solar Challenge that awards cash prizes to teams within communities developing

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innovative models. The government and private developers are not the only groups interested in advancing community solar. More than 120 housing authorities and rural electric co-ops are committing to investing \$287 million towards 280 MW of solar energy projects, projects that will benefit low-to-moderate income households.

Because industry leaders are sharing information that supports successful programs, more communities, people, and industry professionals have been empowered with the right information to continue growing this industry and building clean energy facilities. This will continue long after this administration has moved out of Washington and the next one has moved in, bringing its own renewable energy, community solar, and climate policies along. **ST**