March 29, 2016
Northwest Solar Communities-Final Project Report outlining accomplishments, lessons learned, and path forward

Solar Washington participated in the Northwest Solar Communities project along with dozens of other organizations, jurisdictions and other groups to lower the entry barriers to solar throughout the Pacific Northwest.

Solar Washington board members and staff participated in permitting, finance and interconnection workgroups and both distributed information from these meetings and solicited feedback from its members concerning the work from these groups and proposed changes at the jurisdictional level. SW convened with an interconnection work group to create a roadmap to adopt a streamlined interconnection process culminating, with the input from other stakeholders in the group, with the Solar Ready Toolkit made available to Solar Washington members as well as utilities, jurisdictions and others over the course of this project.

Other accomplishments include reaching out to Washington’s utilities and municipalities with a request for updated information concerning utility interconnection and net metering processes in an effort to facilitate the exchange of information between homeowners, solar industry businesses (including installers) and utilities. An updated list resides on Solar Washington’s website and has been distributed to SW members and other constituents.

Solar Washington representatives participated in meetings of the state Solar PV TAG and relayed results of the meetings to Solar WA members and constituents. Solar Washington was able to participate in several building, electrical, and fire code groups in order to adopt a new policies tailored specifically around solar in Washington. Our results speak for themselves, with several new codes now in effect that make it easier for customers to adopt solar without sacrificing on the safety or security of Washington families, buildings, or emergency response personnel.

Solar Washington held presentations which borrowed from and expanded upon the Solar Ready Toolkit. For example, we conducted an information session addressing how Homeowners Associations accommodated solar during SW's March 2015 General Meeting which was attended by homeowners and solar industry professionals. Solar Washington also hosted an information sharing session at a recent General Meeting involving jurisdiction professionals and others who spoke about recent code improvements (zoning and planning) with respect to solar and opportunities thereof. An example of this is illustrated in Rob Chave’s presentation to attendees at a recent Solar Washington General Meeting where he shared the City of Edmond’s approach to permitting.

We discovered throughout this process that there are many stakeholders - homeowners, utilities, installers, jurisdictions and others - with their own needs, strengths, goals and challenges when it comes to solar adoption. For some solar adoption and interconnection is a new and sometimes daunting process which must be incorporated into their services. And, based on the high solar adoption rate in
the recent past, many jurisdictions and utilities have had to make significant investments in order to accommodate this demand.

By engaging with these stakeholders over the last several months in meetings and other forums, communication gaps among these various groups would be reduced and, as a result, allow for the sharing of new ideas and better practices. We also discovered that stakeholders were eager to share new processes and methods that not only benefitted the end user (i.e. the homeowners), but substantially helped their own internal processes.

In addition to the deliverables tasked to Solar Washington, the organization participated in many other “non-deliverable” (matching activity) related events and projects that followed the spirit and intent of NWSC’s mission to lower the barriers to solar adoption. Solar Washington attended several outreach events providing educational information and materials for homeowners who showed interest in adopting solar. Solar Washington presented the 2015 Washington State Solar Summit which brought together stakeholders including installers, manufacturers, NGOs, legislators, and other industry sectors to discuss issues pertinent to solar in Washington including energy storage, production incentives, utility accommodation of solar and more.

Going forward as an educational organization our mission is to continue to facilitate the understanding and adoption of solar in Washington among various groups. Solar Washington serves all sectors of solar including homeowners, installers, utilities and others in an effort to improve and foster communication between the parties as technologies and market forces change. We’ll continue to keep a close watch on the future of net metering in Washington State as well as how installers can better communicate and share information with jurisdictions, utilities, customers and vice versa.