

Overview of the Renewables Accelerator Residential Solar Cohort

Our Team

In partnership with the Urban Sustainability Directors Network, the World Resources Institute (WRI) and Rocky Mountain Institute (RMI) formed the [Renewables Accelerator](#) in 2019 to provide free tools, resources, and technical assistance to local government staff to accelerate renewable energy adoption and electricity decarbonization in their communities.

Cohort Overview

The Renewables Accelerator team will be running a peer-learning cohort from fall 2020 through the first half of 2021 to help cities and counties accelerate residential solar adoption by implementing community bulk purchasing, often known as Solarize campaigns, and piloting NREL's SolarAPP (Solar Automated Permit Processing) online platform:

- [Solarize](#): A community-based campaign that leverages community outreach and bulk purchasing to expand solar access to residents. The cohort will walk participants through the process of developing a Solarize campaign and explore ways to expand these campaigns by bringing in trusted partners, NGOs, and financial institutions to increase participation in communities of color.
- [SolarAPP](#): An online solar permitting platform aiming to standardize the instant permitting process across the US. The cohort will enable participants to work through testing and piloting SolarAPP as part of the Solarize campaign to determine its feasibility as a permanent online permitting solution.

The Renewables Accelerator team will provide virtual trainings, tools and templates, and access to experienced cities and technical experts from across the US, as well as draw upon the collective cohort expertise, to help participants implement one or both of the above programs in 2020-2021.

Cohort Objectives

This cohort has been structured in response to three crises local governments are currently facing: climate change, racial inequality, and the COVID-19 pandemic. While this cohort will not be a silver bullet, our team hopes it can be one of many useful solutions local governments can use to:

- *Make progress towards community-wide clean energy goals*: Pairing a Solarize campaign with SolarAPP can make solar more affordable by leveraging collective buying power, reducing customer acquisition costs, and reducing soft costs related to permitting. This can have a big impact in increasing residential solar adoption; Solarize campaigns have been shown to increase local solar adoption by 2-3X in targeted communities.
- *Expand access to solar to communities of color*: The cohort will outline ways to go beyond a typical Solarize campaign by partnering with community-based organizations to effectively reach out to communities of color and financial institutions (e.g., Green Banks or CDFIs) to address financial barriers disproportionately faced by communities of color.
- *Educate communities on the benefits of solar*: The Solarize campaign's targeted outreach and education will increase broader awareness and acceptance of the many benefits of solar.
- *Relieve overburdened permitting departments*: Many jurisdictions are moving permitting services online as a temporary solution to COVID-19 social distancing requirements. Piloting NREL's online SolarAPP platform will enable building officials to implement a nationally standardized processes for ensuring code compliant systems and provide a permanent online solution to ensuring building safety while reducing staff time spent on permits.
- *Support the hard-hit local solar industry*: The tiered pricing and time-limited nature of solarize campaigns may motivate residents to act quickly and jumpstart the industry. Implementing SolarAPP may also attract more solar companies to work in a permitting-friendly jurisdiction.

Participant Expectations

To be included in the cohort, we ask that cities and counties:

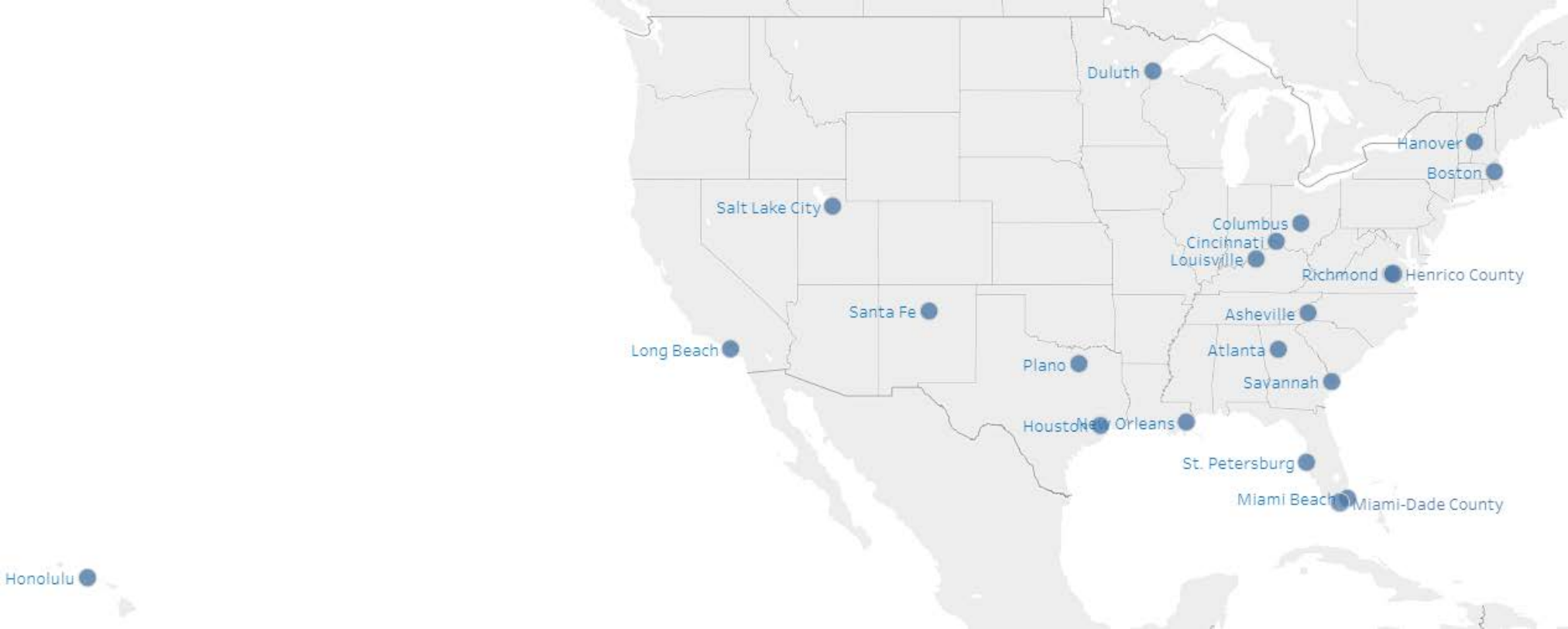
- Commit to launching a Solarize campaign and/or piloting SolarAPP within the cohort timeframe.
- Partner with a trusted community based organization (CBO) and/or financial partner to effectively tailor the Solarize campaign and overcome barriers for low-income and/or communities of color.
- Dedicate the necessary resources and staffing to launch a Solarize campaign and/or pilot SolarAPP.

We estimate this will require ~2-5 hours/week of staff time over the course of the project.

- The local government’s sustainability department representative (or similar department responsible for community-facing energy work) AND local CBO representative must attend all Solarize virtual workshops to coordinate the Solarize campaign.
- The local government’s permitting department must attend all SolarAPP virtual workshops to effectively test SolarAPP and decide whether to pilot it as part of the Solarize campaign.

Cohort Schedule

Solarize Virtual Workshops		SolarAPP Virtual Workshops	
Date	Workshop Details	Date	Workshop Details
October 14, 2020 2:00-4:00pm ET	<u>Cohort Introduction & Developing Partnerships</u> Activities: Introduce the cohort, learn about key aspects of an inclusive Solarize campaign and essential partnerships to reach marginalized communities, and perform a breakout exercise identifying primary and secondary partners		
October 28, 2020 2:00-4:00pm ET	<u>Determining Program Structure & Goal Setting</u> Activities: Allow participants to set campaign goals, choose their Solarize model, and delegate campaign roles and responsibilities between local gov't and CBOs		
November 18, 2020 2:00-4:00pm ET	<u>Addressing Financial Barriers to Solar</u> Activities: Learn about strategies to address financial barriers in Solarize campaigns (e.g. Green Banks, CDFIs, RFP specifications) and develop a strategy to provide financing to lower income residents		
December 16, 2020 2:00-4:00pm ET	<u>Developing & Issuing RFP</u> Activities: Learn about the key components of an inclusive Solarize RFP and use work time modify an RFP template into the local context		
January 20, 2021 2:00-4:00pm ET	<u>Developing the "Face" of the Campaign</u> Activities: Develop the campaign graphic, understand the requirements for building out the campaign webpage or platform, and determine the enrollment process details	February 3, 2021 2:00-4:00pm ET	<u>Securing Buy-In for SolarAPP</u> Activities: Cover the details and advantages of SolarAPP, field questions and concerns from building staff, and hear from early adopters
February 10, 2021 2:00-4:00pm ET	<u>Planning Outreach & Communication Strategy</u> Activities: Use work time to modify outreach and marketing templates into the local context and develop the overall communications strategy and plan	February 24, 2021 2:00-4:00pm ET	<u>Testing SolarAPP</u> Activities: Walk cities through setting up SolarAPP testing and areas to focus on during testing
March 3, 2021 2:00-4:00pm ET	<u>Evaluating RFP Responses</u> Activities: Learn about the process of how the evaluation committee selects an installer and utilize work time to modify RFP proposer evaluation templates	March 17, 2021 2:00-4:00pm ET	<u>Workshopping Challenges from SolarAPP Testing</u> Activities: Workshop problems that come up during testing and have open conversations about any barriers to confidently decide whether or not to pilot SolarAPP
March 24, 2021 2:00-4:00pm ET	<u>Preparing for the Campaign Launch</u> Activities: Use work time to plan for the campaign launch event and use workshop templates to develop the workshop materials		
April - July 2021	<u>Ongoing Campaign Mangement Part 2</u> Activities: Utilize the collective cohort expertise to workshop challenges that may arise during the campaign	April - July 2021	<u>Piloting SolarAPP for Solarize Permits</u> Activities: Workshop problems that come up during piloting





SOLAR UNITED NEIGHBORS

Community Benefits of Solar Co-Ops

Number of Co-op Members: **100**

Broader Impact:

Number Who Go Solar: **28**

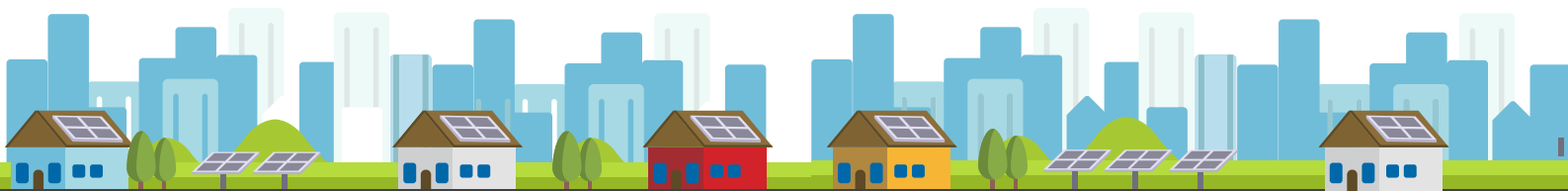
- kW capacity of clean renewable energy: 227
- Local jobs created: 3
- Lbs of CO₂e off-set: 6,868,269
- Energy bill savings that stay in a community
- Increased level 2 charger adoption
- Increased battery storage adoption

Number who Join Together: **7**

- 1 to 3 Public info sessions
- Expanded informal network of solar-educated residents in a community who volunteer and promote solar
- National Solar Tour hosts: 1
- Solar ambassadors : 1

Number who Fight for Solar: **8**

- People who take action like sending postcards to legislators, signing petitions, testifying in support of solar, etc.
- Defend the rights of solar producers
- Improve local rules and regulations
- Fight for equitable access to solar



How we help you go solar

Our Solar Co-op model

- Group process
- 50 – 100 neighbors
- 6-8 month process
- Group selects single installer
- Bulk negotiation for best pricing
- Sign individual contract

MONTH 1 THRU 2

1 LEARN

about the solar co-op

Attend an info session, visit our website

2 SIGN UP

online to participate in the solar co-op

There is a sign-up deadline usually in month 5 or 6

3 GROW THE SOLAR CO-OP

tell your friends and neighbors!

MONTH 3

4 SELECT

an installer once the solar co-op has 30 participants

Solar United Neighbors:

- Issues a competitive RFP on behalf of the solar co-op – open to all installers!
- Review bids, call references and check licensing, equipment and warranties

Solar co-op participants:

- come together to review bids, select a single installer

MONTH 4 THRU 8

★ SIGN UP DEADLINE

Last chance to join the solar co-op

5 SCHEDULE

Installer site visit, receive customized proposal based on solar co-op pricing

6 SIGN A CONTRACT with the installer

7 INSTALL solar system

8 PARTY!

Meet your fellow solar neighbors and celebrate your successes