

Streamlining the Solar Permitting Process for Small-Scale Solar in Los Angeles

Collaborating with stakeholders to leverage existing resources and improve the solar permitting process for jurisdictions, installers, utilities and equipment manufacturers



With solar PV installation poised to double in 2016, local governments face a looming challenge. The U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) estimates that soft or nonhardware costs of solar power, such as installation labor, transaction costs and supply chain costs, account for 64 percent of the total cost of a new solar photovoltaic (PV) system.*

Los Angeles County is the nation's largest county and processes the largest number of solar permitting applications. In August 2015, the county passed an ordinance for a streamlined permitting process for small residential rooftop solar energy systems in compliance with California Assembly Bill 2188.

GOALS



Develop a streamlined permitting process for small-scale solar



Directly reduce soft (nonhardware) costs of solar power for consumers



Create efficient guidelines that can be scaled to meet the needs of other local jurisdictions

THE SOLUTION

The Building and Safety Division of the Los Angeles County Department of Public Works recognized that streamlining and expediting small residential rooftop solar energy systems would encourage adoption of solar PV and help meet renewable energy goals. They explored ways their department could not only help but also lead the solar industry, and in July 2015, organized the Solar Energy Action Committee (SEAC).

The SEAC unites public and private leaders in identifying the many challenges preventing state and local governments from meeting aggressive renewable energy goals. It comprises a highly focused and motivated group of solar experts collaborating on solutions to the many issues impacting the industry. Members include representatives from authorities having jurisdiction, fire departments, solar contractors and manufacturers, testing labs, utilities and associations, including the Center for Sustainable Energy and the California Solar Energy Industry Association.

PROJECT DETAILS

Landscape in Los Angeles

As the nation's largest county, Los Angeles receives a high volume of solar permitting applications. Likewise, there are several stakeholders whose work is impacted by changes to the permitting process. By engaging with these stakeholders through the SEAC and tailoring existing streamlined guidelines, the County mitigated long wait times and helped reduce consumer costs.

Opportunity for Collaboration

Los Angeles County leveraged available resources to streamline its solar permitting process and engaged key solar stakeholders to develop solutions to challenges identified by jurisdictions, installers, utilities and equipment manufacturers. Leadership and innovation are key components to ensuring future growth and success of the solar industry.

Key Impacts

1. Streamlined the solar energy process by involving key stakeholders from every stage of the permitting process, identifying specific challenges and optimizing the overall process for increased efficiency and communication for all parties.
2. Leveraged existing resources to ensure compliance and accountability with AB 2188 and create a uniform, expedited permitting process for small-scale solar. By adopting recommendations made in the California Solar Permitting Guidebook, local governments can reduce permit processing times and increase their output while facilitating local economic development.
3. Developed additional expedited solar permitting toolkit documents for public use, creating a standard that can be scaled to other municipalities across California and throughout the United States.

To learn more about the SunShot Rooftop Solar Challenge or connect with a solar permitting expert, contact the Center for Sustainable Energy.

* <http://energy.gov/eere/sunshot/soft-costs>