Introduction to SolSmart

Dave Golembeski
2/21/23
Acknowledgement and Disclaimer

• Acknowledgment: This material is based upon work supported by the Department of Energy, Office of Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy (EERE), under Award Number DE-EE0007155.

• Disclaimer: This report was prepared as an account of work sponsored by an agency of the United States Government. Neither the United States Government nor any agency thereof, nor any of their employees, makes any warranty, express or implied, or assumes any legal liability or responsibility for the accuracy, completeness, or usefulness of any information, apparatus, product, or process disclosed, or represents that its use would not infringe privately owned rights. Reference herein to any specific commercial product, process, or service by trade name, trademark, manufacturer, or otherwise does not necessarily constitute or imply its endorsement, recommendation, or favoring by the United States Government or any agency thereof. The views and opinions of authors expressed herein do not necessarily state or reflect those of the United States Government or any agency thereof.
Introduction to SolSmart

• What is it?
  • SolSmart is a national designation and technical assistance program that has helped over 480 local governments make it faster, easier, and more affordable for residents and businesses to go solar.

• A SolSmart designation:
  • Recognizes communities that have taken key steps to address local barriers to solar energy and foster the growth of mature local solar markets.
  • Demonstrates that a community is “open for solar business,” making it attractive to solar companies and other business development.

• Bronze, Silver, and Gold Designation Levels
SolSmart Actions

• **Increase transparency**
  • Post a permitting checklist online
  • Develop a solar landing page

• **Increase understanding**
  • Provide training on solar PV to staff working in permitting and inspection
  • Train planning staff on planning and zoning best practices for solar PV

• **Reduce barriers**
  • Decrease permit turnaround time
  • Codify that solar PV is a by-right accessory use in the zoning ordinance

Streamline processes
  + Clear solar guidelines

Better submittals to local government departments
  + Solar training for staff

Shorter processing times

Time savings for department staff
  + Budget savings for local governments
Key Accomplishments: SolSmart
By the Numbers

SolSmart is active in communities across the country. That includes:
• 43 states + District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, U.S. Virgin Islands
• 107 million people (over 1 in 4 U.S. residents)
Pepperell, MA

Population: 12,114
Designation Level: Gold
Year Designated: 2021

• Created an online permitting checklist, increasing transparency for community members and solar installers
• Reviewed local zoning codes and identified restrictions that intentionally or unintentionally prohibit solar PV development
• Allowed solar by-right accessory use in all zones (so solar installations don’t require special permits or hearings)
• Cross-trained both inspection and permitting staff on solar PV
• Provided a streamlined permitting pathway for small PV systems
Core Competencies: Criteria and Designation

- 75 unique credits in 5 different categories that promote best practices to help local governments improve their solar markets
- Each credit has a corresponding point value ranging from 5 to 20
- Foundational Categories:
  - Permitting and Inspection
  - Planning and Zoning
- Special Focus Categories:
  - Government Operations
  - Community Engagement
  - Market Development

"The SolSmart program created a national benchmark for communities to reach and provided the guidance and resources to support adoption of best practices in solar policy." – Maurice Jones, City Manager, Charlottesville, Virginia
Core Competencies: Technical Assistance

• Robust technical assistance team
• Organizations with years of experience providing local governments with the solutions and expertise needed to remove barriers to solar deployment and implement best practices, including:
  o Engineering
  o Procurement
  o Solar PV system design
  o Feasibility assessments
  o Policy and market expertise
• Dissemination of best practices through 1:1 consulting, issue briefs, webinars, trainings (virtual and in-person)

"The process of going solar can be intimidating for property owners and confusing for permitting staff. SolSmart allowed our City to think through our solar procedures and policies and helped us develop clear guidelines for homeowners and staff that have made everyone's life easier." – Kathryn Eklund, Sustainability Coordinator, Red Lodge, Montana
SolSmart Issue Brief: Solar & Electrification, A Beneficial Partnership


SolSmart Criteria/Tentative Criteria:

- Train permitting staff on best practices for permitting solar PV and/or solar and storage systems. Training must have occurred in the past two years. (Required for Silver)
- Train inspection staff on best practices for inspecting solar PV and/or solar and storage systems. Training must have occurred within the past two years. (Required for Silver)
- Demonstrate that current model code (IRC, IBC, and NEC) cycle is implemented in the community for solar and solar plus storage (codes must be the most recent editions (or penultimate edition)).
- Codify a solar requirement for new construction and/or retrofits meeting a specific threshold, in at least one zoning district.
- Require new local government facilities and/or facility retrofits meeting a specific threshold to be solar ready.

Electrification Resources
Join SolSmart

Request a consultation call to learn more:
• https://solsmart.org/join-solsmart