SolSmart Guidance for Advancing Solar Equity

To make solar energy more affordable and accessible to everyone, communities should strive to remove unintentional barriers and ensure that all populations have the opportunity to go solar. To advance this goal, many local governments continue to integrate equity concepts into their policies and procedures. The SolSmart program has created guidance that shows how to apply an equity lens to the best practices identified for SolSmart designation.

Community members may be excluded or deterred from the benefits of solar adoption due to several factors including:

- the upfront cost of solar
- lack of appropriate incentives
- lack of clear and transparent solar information and resources
- lack of cooperation/consideration from relevant community leaders
- lack of community input on solar adoption practices
- lack of options for renters

Accounting for these factors will put a community on the road to realizing its full solar potential with equitable opportunities for all.

Please use the following to guide your considerations to advance solar equity in your community while pursuing SolSmart designation. The SolSmart technical assistance team is available to assist communities on this path at no cost. For more information, contact us at SolSmart@IRECUSA.org.

Priority Credits to Advance Solar Equity

The SolSmart credits are listed below, and beneath each are specific ways that the credit can be executed with an equity lens.

PZ-18: Train planning staff on best practices in planning and zoning for solar PV. Training must have occurred in the past five years.

*Equity Lens — Training sessions include a focus on any or all of the following topics:*

- Prioritize underserved and environmentally impacted parts of the community as targets for future solar development
- Evaluate potential plans (such as comprehensive plans, community action plans, renewable portfolio standards, etc.) for opportunities to increase solar development in LMI neighborhoods
- Consider financial opportunities such as upfront or production-based incentives, pay-as-you-save-financing, carveouts in programs/incentives for targeted communities, and subsidized loans
- Develop ownership structures (ex. community solar) to support increased LMI solar development that aligns with state law
- Set goals targeting increased percentage or amount of LMI-owned solar development within the jurisdiction

PZ-19: Draft new or updated language and provide a timeline for the inclusion of specific solar PV goals, metrics, and/or strategies into existing and/or future plans.

*Equity Lens — Draft language includes any or all of the following goals:*
- Increase the amount of locally or LMI-owned solar by a specific percentage or capacity amount
- Construct a specific percentage or capacity amount of new solar projects with a local workforce
- Implement Solarize/community solar program with specific LMI targets built into plans
- Track how many new solar projects are implemented in LMI neighborhoods
- Implement other strategies or goals to increase solar access, including upfront or production-based incentives, pay-as-you-save financing, carveouts in programs/incentives for targeted households, and subsidized loans

PZ-20: Include specific solar PV goals, metrics, and/or strategies in the most current version of relevant local plans (e.g. energy plan, climate plan, comprehensive plan).

**Equity Lens — Language includes any or all of the following goals:**
- Increase amount of locally owned solar by a specific percentage or capacity amount
- Construct a specific percentage or capacity amount of new solar projects with a local workforce
- Implement Solarize/community solar program with LMI considerations built into the program (such as carveouts for LMI neighborhoods)
- Track how many new solar projects are implemented in LMI neighborhoods and evaluate strategies that are successful or unsuccessful toward new solar implementation
- Implement other strategies or goals to increase solar access, including upfront or production-based incentives, pay-as-you-save financing, carveouts in programs/incentives for targeted households, subsidized loans, etc.

GO-2: Discuss community goals for solar PV, net metering, community solar, and/or interconnection processes with the local utility and explore areas for future collaboration. Compile summary and next steps in a memo.

**Equity Lens — Discussion includes any or all of the following goals:**
- Evaluate potential development sites that can improve access to solar for local LMI neighborhoods
- Evaluate potential development sites with a focus on potential financial/economic impacts that new solar PV may have on LMI neighborhoods
- Include residents or community leaders from LMI neighborhoods in discussions between community and local utilities

GO-3: Coordinate with regional organizations and/or local governments to engage utilities on advancing solar policies such as utility procurement of solar PV, green tariffs, and/or interconnection process improvements.

**Equity Lens — Discussion includes any or all of the following topics/elements:**
- Include the consideration of LMI neighborhoods within solar policy topic discussions (such as utilizing green tariffs to promote more affordable solar opportunities for LMI neighborhoods)
- Include LMI residents or community leaders in discussions to engage utilities

CE-1: Post a solar landing page on local government’s website with information that may include the community’s solar goals, educational materials and tools that promote solar, and resources for solar development (e.g. permitting checklist, application forms, zoning regulations, etc.).

**Equity Lens — Include goals, materials, or tools for LMI solar efforts on landing page**

CE-3: Post online resources about residential and commercial solar PV financing options and incentives.

**Equity Lens — Include resources specifically tailored to solar financing options/incentives for LMI neighborhoods (for example, loans, incentives, pay as you save, PACE financing, program carveouts for LMI neighborhoods). Include resources in other languages if relevant to the community.**
CE-9: Support a solar informational session and/or solar tour explaining solar PV opportunities and policies. Session/Tour must have occurred within the last 5 years.  
*Equity Lens — Include targeted sessions/tours for stakeholders/audiences that deal with potential solar access issues (such as how renters and other non-rooftop solar households can support a community solar development). Include solar equity topics relevant to LMI neighborhoods (such as loans, incentives, other programs).*

CE-10: Distribute solar job training and career opportunities in coordination with local colleges and/or workforce development organizations.  
*Equity Lens — Distribution of resources should include any or all of the following elements:*

- Discuss partnerships with local high schools, colleges, DOL workforce system representatives, community action programs, and other organizations providing training and wraparound services for historically disadvantaged learners/workers
- Discuss career opportunities tailored to residents in LMI neighborhoods (such as opportunities specifically seeking local labor for LMI solar projects)

CE-11: Demonstrate local government support for local solar projects through speeches, press releases, opinion articles, etc.  
*Equity Lens — Promote solar projects in LMI neighborhoods*

- Local government support can also include more grassroots models such as identifying allies that can attend community events or community solar tours, which may be more appropriate for certain communities

CE-12: Discuss solar PV goals and/or strategies for increasing solar PV development within an appropriate committee, commission, taskforce, and/or working group. (e.g. solar is a recurring agenda item during monthly sustainability commission meetings).  
*Equity Lens — Discussions should include any or all of the following elements:*

- Encourage collaboration between both solar-related and equity-related committees, commissions, task forces, and/or working groups
- Evaluate potential development sites that can improve access to solar for local LMI neighborhoods
- Evaluate potential development sites with a focus on potential financial/economic impacts that new solar PV may have on LMI neighborhoods
- Include residents or community leaders in LMI neighborhoods in committees, commissions, task forces, and/or working groups

MD-3: Encourage low-to-moderate income (LMI) participation in community-wide group purchase program through program design and/or financing support options.

MD-5: Encourage low-to-moderate income (LMI) participation in a community solar program through program design and/or financing support options.

MD-9: Provide local incentives for solar PV to low-to-moderate income (LMI) households, Disadvantaged Business Enterprises (DBEs), and/or non-profit organizations that provide community services.

*Additional credits to consider to advance equitable solar access*
PI-18: Share site specific solar PV and/or solar and storage permit data, including addresses, with first responders and their departments. (e.g. through software that allows users to view searchable, filterable data about a specific site and system).

Equity Lens — Link permit data with neighborhood income/poverty data to better organize/identify solar developments in LMI neighborhoods/zip codes

CE-7: Post an online dashboard or summary of the solar PV metrics for your community.

Equity Lens — Include any or all of the following indicators:
- Percentage of solar installations in LMI neighborhoods (preferably over time)
- Number of solar installations in LMI neighborhoods (preferably over time)
- Percentage of LMI households with solar installations (preferably over time)
- Number of LMI households with solar installations (preferably over time)
- Cost of solar PV in jurisdiction as compared to state- or country-wide energy cost average (for all sources of energy) (preferably over time)
- Local solar jobs created by increased deployment

CE-8: Post an online solar map for your community.

Equity Lens — Include an overlay of neighborhoods by income level (i.e. indicate where LMI neighborhoods are located on solar map)

MD-7: Provide a PACE financing program that includes solar PV as an eligible technology.

Equity Lens — Provide a PACE program that includes an LMI focus for solar PV development

MD-10: Partner with financial institutions and/or foundations to offer loans, rebates, grants, or other incentives for solar PV projects. (Financial institutions could include entities such as a local or regional bank, CDFI, or credit union).

Equity Lens — Partnership should include any or all of the following topics/elements:
- Partner with institutions/foundations that offer loans, rebates, grants, or other incentives specifically focused on LMI neighborhoods (such as pay as you save or upfront/production-based incentives)
- Partner with institutions/foundations that have an explicit focus on solar PV for LMI neighborhoods

Resources

Below are resources that provide more information on the equity lens topics:

- NC Clean Energy Technology Center, [DSIRE: Database of State Incentives for Renewables & Efficiency](https://www.dsireusa.org/)
- Jenny Heeter et al., [Design and Implementation of Community Solar Programs for Low- and Moderate-Income Customers](https://www.nrel.gov/), National Renewable Energy Laboratory (March 2016)
- Connecticut Green Bank, [Solar For All Program Creates Savings for Homeowners](https://www.ctgreenbank.com/)
- Clean Energy States Alliance, [A Directory of State Clean Energy Programs and Policies for Low- and Moderate-Income Residents](https://www.see.org/)
- SolSmart Webinar, [How to Develop a Solarize Campaign](https://www.solsmart.org/)
- RMI, [Solarize Campaigns: Helping Communities of Color Access Rooftop Solar](https://www.rmi.org/)
- State of California, [SOMAH: Solar on Multi-Family Housing](https://www.energy.ca.gov/)
