



12 Best Practices: A Roadmap to a Solar Friendly Community

Overview

Solar Friendly Communities encourages the expansion of solar energy by making it easier for citizens to go solar. We work with communities to streamline solar permitting to make the process easier for local governments, faster for solar installers and more affordable for citizens who want to use solar energy.

We recognize communities that take steps to encourage solar by honoring them as 'Solar Friendly Communities'. This roadmap explains the framework of the program. Considering that solar energy is one of the fastest growing industries in the nation, promoting solar use can provide cities and counties with a tangible economic development benefit for their efforts.

Why create a Solar Friendly Communities program?

Solar Friendly Communities is working to achieve the goal of the federal SunShot initiative: to bring down the costs of solar to be competitive with other energy sources by the end of this decade. The ambitious goal aims to encourage the spread of a locally powered, job-creating energy source that harnesses the free power of the sun without pollution, fuel costs or water use.

Rooftop solar energy systems are rapidly dropping in cost and thus becoming increasingly appealing to a broad range of citizens. Currently costs other than the panels and hardware, otherwise known as "soft" costs, including permitting, installation, overhead and other related costs account for about half the costs of a rooftop solar system. Streamlining permitting processes and bringing those costs down will bring down the cost of solar energy for everyone.



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How does the Solar Friendly Communities program work?

Communities earn points by streamlining the permitting process for solar installations on residential properties, and generally promoting solar locally. There are many routes to earning enough points to win designation as a Solar Friendly Community. The program is designed to be flexible and allow participation by both larger and smaller communities. While the emphasis is on things the local government can achieve, the wider goals of promoting solar development are also emphasized in several steps.

Many communities have already taken measures to encourage solar development and will be well on the way to earning Solar Friendly Community status. You may be well on your way to recognition and we will work with you to take the next steps.

As you will note, the program lays out a total of 1600 points. Communities can earn designation starting at 700 points, for Bronze level recognition. More ambitious designations are Silver, at 900 points, Gold at 1100 points, and Platinum at 1400 points.

YOUR COMMUNITY CAN EARN RECOGNITION SIMPLY BY ADOPTING STEPS 1, 2 and 3!

Below are a variety of steps you can take to earn points for your community. Points are cumulative unless specified with steps that specify “OR”:



Provide a checklist of all requirements for rooftop solar PV and solar thermal permitting in a single online location/// 275 points total possible

- a. Provide checklists of all community requirements for PV and post them online at your community website: **100 points**



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- b. Provide checklists of all community requirements for solar thermal and post them online at your community website: **100 points**
- c. Designate a solar coordinator as the community lead tasked with community outreach and internal coordination among departments : **50 points**
- d. Provide a designated solar permitting page with information on how permits are processed and links to other related entities. Include utility interconnection procedures, applicable rebate programs, and other solar incentive programs. Post updates on available webinars and other training opportunities available to permitting officials and industry. **25 points**



Offer a standard permit form that is eligible for streamlined review for standard residential or small commercial rooftop flush-mounted systems/// 275 points possible

- a. Adopt the [Solar ABC's Expedited Permit Process for PV Systems](#). This national standard of procedures and forms was developed by experts and provides a way for communities to adopt a national standard: **225 points**
 - i. **OR:** Use a standard form for PV systems eligible for expedited permitting in your community: **50 points**
 - ii. **OR:** For communities within the jurisdiction of the State Electrical Board, use a standard form for structural review of PV systems eligible for expedited permitting in your community: **100 points**
- b. Use the national standard Solar ABC's Expedited Permit Process electrical plans diagram (page 14 of [Solar ABC's Expedited Permit Process for PV Systems](#)) that outlines electrical requirements and



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explains how the system will be put together. Incorporate into your community's permit forms **100 points**

- c. Authorize plan checkers to communicate electronically with installers for speedy resolution of issues that arise: **25 points**
- d. Designate one primary point of contact for installers with questions on standard permits even if multiple departments are reviewing: **25 points**

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Offer electronic or over-the-counter submittal and review options for standard systems/// 150 points possible

- a. Offer electronic submittal, review and permit issuance: **150 points**
- b. OR: Offer over-the-counter submittal, review and permit issuance: **100 points**

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Issue permits within a specified time frame //100 points possible

- a. Issue permits for standard systems the same day as complete applications are submitted, electronically or over the counter: **100 points**
- b. OR: Issue permits within 3 days: **50 points**
- c. OR: State the policy on the timing of permit issuance as part of the permitting package and adhere to the timeline **25 points**

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Charge actual costs for permits and inspections with a cap on the total/// 200 points possible

- a. Cap total permit costs at a flat fee of \$250 or less for standard residential systems: **100 points**



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- b. Adopt a method of allowing systems that meet standard engineering calculations based on your community's wind and snow loads to be exempt from providing a separate P.E. Stamp on each system. For example, the jurisdiction could require systems to adhere to standard engineering calculations on file with the jurisdiction. Document the system used and post an explanation online: **50 points**
- c. Exempt rooftop solar systems from sales or use taxes to encourage citizens to go solar: **50 points**

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Replace community-specific solar licenses, if required, with standard certification for installers / //25 points possible

- a. Accept NABCEP PV installer and solar thermal certification in lieu of community-specific solar licenses – **25 points**

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Provide inspection checklist that explains unique requirements beyond applicable codes/// 50 points possible

- a. Post inspection checklist along with permitting requirements, listing issues of particular concern to your jurisdiction on your website – **25 points**
- b. Post changes to existing codes, code interpretations, and inspection requirements as they occur in writing on your website. – **10 points**
- c. Share the changes as they occur with a solar industry nonprofit for timely communication to installers – **15 points**

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Specify a narrow time window for system inspection/// 75 points possible

- a. Give installers a timeframe window of two hours or less when



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scheduling an inspection : **50 points**

- b. OR: Allow installers to schedule next day inspections with a morning or afternoon window of time - **15 points**
- c. Allow installers to track progress and timing of inspections through telephone or web-based system - **25 points**



For efficiency, require only one inspection for standard rooftop systems on existing homes or businesses///100 points possible

- a. Require only a rough inspection or a final inspection of standard rooftop systems, but not both- **75 points**
- b. For NABCEP-certified installers, allow installer affidavit to substitute for inspectors physically climbing on the roof and/or have inspector hand the installer a camera to photograph installation - **15 points**
- c. Adopt a written policy that you support offering staff free training as it is made available by the DOE and others- **10 points**



Adopt ordinances that encourage distributed solar generation and protect solar rights and access including reasonable roof setback requirements/// 150 points possible

- a. Designate rooftop solar systems an allowed use in all zones of your community- **50 points**
- b. Work with local fire officials to craft solar-friendly setback requirements while respecting firefighter safety concerns. Document your efforts in writing. - **50 points**



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- c. Adopt policies encouraging community solar projects and arrays on multifamily buildings to help make such projects available to low-income residents and those without solar access on their roofs– **25 points**
- d. Adopt written goals that support balancing solar development with other community goals such as urban forestry and historic preservation – **25 points**

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Educate residents on solar energy by providing information on financing options and projected economic benefit ///125 points possible

- a. Provide educational information about solar options for residents through community outreach channels such as websites and cable television – **25 points**
- b. Provide educational community programs that explain financing options and programs such as solar gardens that are available through state, utility or regional initiatives – **50 points**
- c. Participate in available programs that offer innovative financing or expand options for rooftop solar such as group purchasing or a PACE-type program – **50 points**

12

Show your commitment to being a Solar Friendly Community by tracking community solar development and provide tools showing solar access in your community// 75 points possible

- a. Keep a running tabulation of the installed solar in your community by project type. Work with your utility to quantify solar installations and publicize through your communication channels including your website – **50 points**



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- b. **OR:** Partner with local energy efficiency and renewable energy groups (including but not limited to EnergySmart programs, local nonprofits, and utility partnerships) to promote solar energy in your community – **50 points**
- c. Provide maps on the solar portion of your community website showing the areas of greatest solar potential/ insolation in your community – 10 points
- d. Encourage and promote rooftop solar development as one of your community's stated goals – **15 points.**

Here are the levels of recognition your community can receive:

1600 points total

(Bronze) Level 1—700 points

(Silver) Level 2—900 points

(Gold) Level 3– 1,100 points

(Platinum) Level 4– 1,400 points

Questions?

Please Contact Senior Program Director Rebecca Cantwell at

COSEIA: rcantwell@coseia.org or call 303-333-7342