

“No Regrets” Community Solar Development

Customizable Workshop Description

Cliburn and Associates, LLC

Workshop Description:

Community Solar is a fast-growing third path to solar development, along with utility- and customer-based solar projects. Community Solar and related “shared solar” models are peaking customer interest across the country, and especially in the West and Upper Midwest. This one-day workshop would be planned specifically for one or more utilities or a regional stakeholder sponsor. Where one utility is involved, it is important to note that community solar is cross-departmental; programs are best designed collaboratively. The final agenda will take account of the utility perspective, regional policies and trends, and relevant case studies in green power, community solar and, where relevant, community wind projects. Then it will lead participants in designing customized programs that take community renewables further—anticipating the utility’s continuing leadership in a growing, changing market for renewables and customer-based energy solutions.

This workshop will lead each participant in developing metrics for designing or outsourcing their utility-specific community solar program. These pertain to: 1) understanding the market in terms of the cost, performance, and risk profile of existing solar options; 2) developing an apples-to-apples comparison of economic and risk-management factors for strawman business models (utility-driven PPA, third-party development, etc.); 3) program design and marketing that manages utility risks, from maintaining high participation and cost-competitiveness to protecting the utility’s brand. An additional, proposed component would discuss the broader context of local participation in energy development. How can the utility determine when a community solar project is most appropriate? What lessons learned from past experiences might apply to community solar? How can awareness of popular customer choices throughout the region enhance overall renewable energy program success? At the end of the day, each participant will have a draft presentation that addresses pertinent questions for their department, stakeholder group, or utility at large.

Activities for the Day:

The workshop will assume a basic understanding of the topic, so participants can focus on applying knowledge gained to their own utility situations. Resources will be provided to registrants who wish to “prep” for an exciting day, which will include:

1. Interactive materials, helping zero in on utility-specific information and key questions for the day
2. Demonstration of analytics and decision tools, based on research for Sacramento Municipal Utility District (SMUD) and other leading community solar programs; discussion of do-it-yourself options versus outsourced expertise
3. Case studies, potentially using peer-to-peer sharing
4. Training techniques that allow participants to “check their work,” without sharing confidential data

About Cliburn and Associates, LLC.

This workshop is designed and led by Jill K. Cliburn, an award-winning utility trainer and a leader in community solar development for utilities and the communities they serve. Cliburn and Associates, LLC has provided research on this topic for the NRECA Cooperative Research Network, the APPA “DEED” Public Power Research and Demonstration Program, and on related topics for the Solar Electric Power Association. Her past work also includes leadership in integrated resource planning and demand-side strategies, as well as developing best practices around community wind development. Contact: Jill K. Cliburn at jkcliburn@gmail.com or 505-490-3070.