

Project SunLight™

Sponsored by the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) Solar Energy Technologies Office



ICAST launched Project Sunlight in 2019 in partnership with the Smart Electric Power Alliance (SEPA), to advance a nationally scalable approach to providing solar PV access to low-income (LI) residents living in multifamily affordable housing (MFAH) properties.

Project Approach

1. Develop partnerships with utilities, investors, MFAH property owners and other stakeholders.
2. Focus on low-cost financing from mission and impact investors.
3. Focus on community solar or virtual net metering opportunities.
4. Sign up entire MFAH properties, not individual income qualified LI tenants.
5. Partner with utilities on combined billing, financing (ownership), subscription, and other services.

Identify Utility Best Practices and Opportunities

To better understand the current best practices and opportunities to scale LI community solar (CS) program opportunities nationally, ICAST partnered with SEPA. SEPA surveyed utilities on their current practices and future plans to offer a CS program for LI customers or that includes an LI customer component. SEPA discussed the regulatory drivers and considerations currently offered or under development, such as avoiding cross-subsidization, and tariff and rate structure designs, as well as partnerships with stakeholders.

Key takeaways from the survey include:

- In CS markets or programs without an explicit LI requirement, LI customers have not meaningfully participated or benefited in CS programs.
- There are several barriers to LI customer participation:
 - o Premium CS subscription programs are a non-starter for LI customers.
 - o The annual process for identifying and qualifying LI participants is cumbersome and expensive
 - o Higher acquisition/retention costs for LI customers
 - ❖ LI households are more likely to be renters and to move more frequently.

- CS policies or program components that can facilitate and expedite the recruitment of LI customers include:
 - o A lower payment rate applicable to participating LI customers, and potentially a rate that offers monthly savings immediately.
 - o Use of an opt-out program approach for LI customers.
 - o Establishment of a universal or statewide definition of LI.
 - o Allowing customers to leverage existing LI program qualifiers (e.g. qualifications for Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP).
 - o Allowing affordable rental housing properties to qualify in their entirety.
- Utilities that currently are not authorized to offer a LI CS program wish to do so, and/or would like to offer value added services (including services that could facilitate and expedite the recruitment of LI customers) to non-utility CS developers.

The U.S. DOE grant offers utilities no-cost technical assistance from ICAST and SEPA to develop or refine a CS program specifically for LI subscribers. To take advantage of this assistance, interested utilities must submit a letter of interest by July 2021.

About ICAST

ICAST (International Center for Appropriate and Sustainable Technology) is a national 501(c)3 nonprofit organization that provides green retrofit services, including solar PV and other distributed energy resources (DER) solutions to existing MFAH properties. ICAST was spun out from the University of Colorado Engineering School in 2002. ICAST launched Triple Bottom Line Foundation (TBL Fund), a U.S. Treasury Department certified Community Development Financial Institution in December 2014 to provide energy financing to MFAH properties.



About SEPA

The Smart Electric Power Alliance (SEPA) helps address the most pressing issues encountered in the smart transition to a carbon-free energy system by 2050. Utilities, industry, regulators and other electric power stakeholders trust SEPA to provide education, research, standards and collaboration around a clean and modern energy future. For more information, visit: <https://sepapower.org/>