

# **EnergizeNC Solar For All Grant Application**

## **Executive Summary**

On October 11, 2023, the NC Solar for All Coalition (the Coalition), led by the North Carolina Department of Environmental Quality (NCDEQ), requested \$250,000,000 in funding through the EPA Greenhouse Gas Reduction Fund Solar for All program for its EnergizeNC program. EnergizeNC will develop and execute a robust and equitable program enabling the rapid deployment of distributed solar and associated storage with meaningful benefits to over 20,000 low-income and disadvantaged communities (LIDAC) across the state, including state- and federally recognized tribal lands, resulting in at least 69.5 megawatts (MW) of residential solar by the end of the five-year program.

North Carolina is highly ranked in solar energy and generates >9% of the state's power from solar, giving the state strong experience in solar energy that will help in implementing a large-scale residential solar program. In 2022, SEIA ranked North Carolina 4<sup>th</sup> in the nation in total installed solar, but the vast majority of that comes from utility-scale projects. NC is ranked much lower in residential net-metered solar capacity (17<sup>th</sup>), as well as solar jobs in the state (11<sup>th</sup>) and solar growth projection over the next 5 years (28<sup>th</sup>). The EnergizeNC program application aims to transform solar in the state by expanding access to residential solar for low- and moderate-income families, multi-family housing, and community solar, and strengthening solar job training and the solar job market. Through these efforts, the EnergizeNC program will support the achievement of the ambitious carbon goals already set at the state level while ensuring low- and moderate-income families directly benefit.

Coalition members include four mission-aligned organizations: NCDEQ (which houses the NC State Energy Office [SEO] and the Weatherization Assistance Program [WAP]); two nonprofit organizations, the North Carolina Clean Energy Fund (NCCEF) and North Carolina Advanced Energy Corporation (Advanced Energy); and the North Carolina Clean Energy Technology Center (NCCETC), part of the state's flagship land-grant university, NC State University. The Coalition's strength lies not only in the technical expertise of its four members but also in the multi-sectorial partnership of over 70 organizations that have offered letters of support. Among these supporters is North Carolina Governor Roy Cooper. Over the course of a five-year period, the Coalition, along with its diverse partners, will implement EnergizeNC. The first year will be dedicated to planning.

EnergizeNC brings to bear lessons adapted from previous national processes, including efforts under the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act of 2021 and the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) of 2022, both of which targeted expansion of low- and moderate-income (LMI) access to community solar. It also leverages state-level experience from years of stakeholder efforts and convenings through the North Carolina Utilities Commission (NCUC)'s Carbon Plan Integrated Resource Plan process that, by statute, mandates a 100% decarbonized power sector in our state by 2050. Coalition members have been involved in this and numerous other state planning processes (e.g., State Clean Energy Plan and the new U.S. Environmental Protection Agency [EPA] Carbon Pollution Reduction Grant [CPRG] process) designed both to drive investment in clean energy and to address energy inequity, insecurity, and resiliency in North Carolina.

The results of these previous processes and an anticipated one-year EnergizeNC planning phase will allow us to consult a varied group of stakeholders (including consumers, communities, tribes, contractors, nonprofit housing developers, and others) to understand our state's existing baseline, and barriers to, solar and storage deployment. This initial assessment process will guide the setting of additional program metrics for success and identify potential innovative program pilots that can be explored as part of a market transformation strategy that can grow in later years to remove deployment barriers and facilitate grid resiliency.

Throughout the program, the Coalition will focus on four goals:

**Goal #1:** Create a comprehensive project management approach over a one-year planning period to include input from LIDAC.

**Goal #2:** Reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, lower energy costs, and foster environmental justice through the installation of rooftop solar at low-income single-family and multifamily units across North Carolina, including community solar access.

**Goal #3:** Foster and develop a trained workforce to deploy solar in all regions of the state, especially in minority and tribal communities, while working to ensure transparent ethical and business practices that protect consumers from potential market abuses.

**Goal #4:** Provide robust community engagement to ensure that project benefits flow to disadvantaged communities and individuals.

To bring the highest impact to North Carolina families, EnergizeNC will focus its financial incentives programs on providing meaningful household energy savings to three priority areas: 1) rooftop solar (and, in limited cases, storage) installation in single-family homes; 2) behind-the-meter solar installation at multifamily housing owned and operated by nonprofit and public organizations; and 3) community solar pilot programs, many with municipal utilities and electric co-ops, which will lower energy costs for participating households.

EnergizeNC will employ a meaningful community benefits strategy encompassing numerous additional elements that promote equitable access to solar and facilitate community ownership models that allow access to additional economic benefits of asset ownership to flow to disadvantaged communities.

Technical assistance will be extended to key community partners (e.g., local governments, community organizations, and small utilities) for issues relating to solar and storage deployment, financial literacy, and the solar value proposition. In addition, the Coalition plans to leverage and support our strong network of contractor training providers by working with them to ensure curricula and instruction meet acceptable credentialing standards.

The Coalition will conduct community engagement and education around the benefits of solar deployment and the specifics of the programs offered. This engagement will take place in partnership with a diverse array of trusted community partners in person, virtually, and through tools like an 800-number hotline and an online portal. Customer and community outreach will be

designed to accommodate information delivery for EnergizeNC incentives and additional home energy and electrification programs, including other Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) rebates.

The EnergizeNC Coalition has received an unprecedented level of support from organizations across the state, from small community-based nonprofits like NC 100 to large organizations like the NAACP and United Way. Implementation and outreach will be made possible through these partnerships. Similarly, our financing strategy draws from the depth of experience brought by a strong network of green banks, community development financial institutions (CDFIs), and other community lenders.

Underlying our entire deployment strategy is a robust and effective workforce and labor integration that will ensure that EnergizeNC promotes capacity building within our already vibrant small business community. We will work to grow the state's solar workforce with programs to expand and diversify our contractor base with the creation of new well-qualified, well-paid jobs. EnergizeNC will integrate meaningful consumer protection to ensure quality work and conformance with appropriate and ethical business practices.

Program design and planning will rely on a wide and strong network of business, community, and nonprofit partners across the state. EnergizeNC will also work closely with these trusted partners to tap outreach and implementation strategies that have proven effective in past North Carolina campaigns and programs, informed by best practices nationally.

As we work, we will measure and track the impact of the program, including GHG emissions reductions, energy burden improvement, and workforce development, to meet EPA requirements and ensure accountability to stakeholders and the people of the state.

EnergizeNC builds on existing programs and expertise from multiple organizations across North Carolina. It harnesses the full "toolkit" of program and policy tools — both available now and under development — that will pair with the Solar for All subsidies to reduce GHG emissions and other harmful pollutants while lowering energy costs for low-income and disadvantaged households and creating environmental and energy justice across the state.

The EnergizeNC Coalition is pleased to present our application for the Solar for All funding opportunity and looks forward to working with a diverse set of stakeholders to deploy solar equitably across the state.