



RenewableNY

Solar Outreach Initiative, Final Report
February 2018



RenewableNY's Final Report

Lessons learned from three years of solarize campaigns

For the past three years, the RenewableNY team has worked to increase solar capacity, support and grow the solar industry, and make it easier and educate and empower homeowners and small businesses as consumers while making affordable for homeowners and small businesses to choose solar through community Solarize campaigns.

Solarize campaigns are community-lead initiatives that use public education and group purchasing models to bring down costs of solar for the consumer and bring customers to installers, reducing their soft costs. Campaigns also bridge an information gap for the consumer, helping them get the right information at the right time to make the decision to go solar. Everyone wins.

This report details the main lessons we've learned, and we hope it will serve to guide organizations and community volunteers who continue this work.



A yellow banner with the text "SOLARIZE makes solar affordable" in large, bold, white letters. Below the text, there is a logo for "NEW YORK STATE OF OPPORTUNITY" and a partial logo for "Sup Co Sol". At the bottom of the banner, there is a blue bar with the website address "www.solarize-hudsonvalley.org" in white text.

RenewableNY's Solar Outreach Initiative

In his 2012 book, *Green Is Good: Save Money, Make Money, and Help Your Community Profit from Clean Energy*, Brian Keene wrote, "...Americans have cumulatively bought more pet rocks than solar roof installations, solar hot water heaters, or any other combination of clean energy home cooling or heating systems." While this had improved some by 2015, clean energy was still in its early adoption phase in New York.

In February 2015 RenewableNY--a program of Catskill Mountainkeeper and a partnership of organizations collaborating to change New York's energy landscape and accelerate New York to its 100% clean energy future--set out to reframe solar in the public mind, from an exotic future technology to an emerging social norm that is straightforward to adopt and completely viable today. By achieving this understanding in the marketplace, we would be able to support the solar industry, engage young people in the clean energy economy, and expand the reach of solar in 15 New York counties.

Our Team

RenewableNY is a program of Catskill Mountainkeeper, and Mountainkeeper served as managing partner for the Solar Outreach Initiative. Binghamton Regional Sustainability Coalition, Cornell Cooperative Extension, Tompkins County, and Sustainable Hudson Valley were critically important partners, spearheading campaigns and projects in each of the areas where they work.

Where We Work

Binghamton Regional Sustainability Coalition

- Tioga County
- Broome County
- Chenango County
- Otsego County
- Delaware County

Catskill Mountainkeeper

- Sullivan County

Cornell Cooperative Extension, Tompkins County

- Schuyler County
- Chemung County
- Tompkins County
- Steuben County



Sustainable Hudson Valley

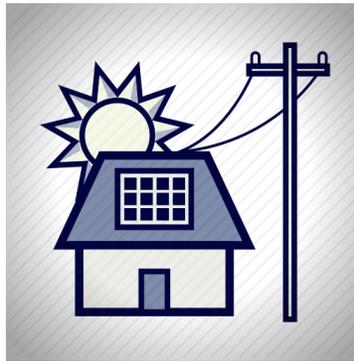
- Ulster County
- Dutchess County
- Putnam County
- Rockland County
- Orange County

Our Goals



INSPIRE BEHAVIOR CHANGE

Run amazing solarize campaigns that get homeowners the info and community support they need to choose solar.



INCREASE SOLAR CAPACITY

Add at least 6MW of solar capacity to the grid.



BUILD THE WORKFORCE OF THE FUTURE

Train young people in marketing, organizing, and the solar industry, giving them the skills they need to hit their career running.

Community Based Marketing and Solarize

When we began our work, we weren't starting from scratch - we were able to draw from the Solarize experience in other regions, NYSERDA, and overarching principles known as Community-Based Social Marketing. The first steps in the Community Based Marketing methodology had been taken - we already had a target: getting home and business owners to go solar. We'd identified the barriers: a subdued marketplace, lack of general understanding, of renewable technology among consumers, and high "soft costs" for the industry. The Solarize model was designed to overcome these by building trust with consumers and communities, providing incentives to go solar with discounts and a deadline, and reducing installer marketing costs with grassroots outreach and earned media.



Solarize: Key Ingredients for Success

Every solarize campaign is unique. But the most successful ones have key ingredients adapted for a specific community. These include:

- **Partnerships** with community leaders, influential organizations, elected officials, local governments, religious institutions, environmental organizations, civic groups, libraries, chambers of commerce, local colleges, and more;
- A strong **volunteer** base;
- Fun **events** that draw a crowd;
- Smart **communications**, including earned, paid, and social media; and
- **Front loaded campaigns** that are well-planned from the beginning with flexibility built-in.



Partnerships

Organizational and municipal partners with active memberships, as well as a potential volunteer bases are critical to successful campaigns. Here's a partial list of RenewableNY's diverse partners.

- Mother's Out Front
- People for Healthy Environment
- Community Leaders of Color
- Chambers of Commerce
- County Planning Departments
- County Legislatures
- Commerce Chenango
- Transition Catskills
- Broome Tioga Workforce
- Binghamton University
- RUPCO
- SUNY Sullivan
- Northern Dutchess Alliance
- **Libraries, libraries, libraries**

Volunteers

In almost every case, volunteers were the lifeblood of RenewableNY's campaigns. In many cases, they drove the installer selection process, organized outreach opportunities, served as Solar Ambassadors in their communities, planned and timed the campaigns, provided the campaigns with authenticity and local knowledge, and made the campaigns their own.

One of the lessons the RenewableNY team learned is that **the number of volunteers isn't nearly as important as how engaged they are in the campaign.**



Events

Over the three year span of our work, the RenewableNY team ran more than 300 community outreach events. These events included: tables at farmers markets, local concerts and fairs; presentations to civic, municipal, and community groups; stand-alone events at libraries, town halls, community centers, breweries; and more. In our experience:

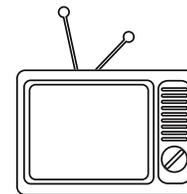
- Location matters--the more fun, the better;
- Hands on, interactive tools draw crowds; and
- **Partner organizations** who help host events, reaching out to their base, make all the difference.

Communications

A strong communications plan was central to our campaigns. We knew that in addition to getting information out through solar ambassadors and partners, we would need recognition in both traditional and social media. Press release templates provided by NYSERDA helped us get going, and we were soon gathering a wealth of quotes, cases, statistics and photos from the campaign's own experience to customize these.

In 2015 when we began, Solarize was still a fairly new concept. Getting media coverage through press releases, invitations to events, and one-on-one outreach to reporters was successful. As time went on and the campaigns became more entrenched in our communities, solarize leaders were seen by the press as resources. on technical issues such as zoning moratoria, technology questions and the nuances of renewable energy politics at the local level.

Social and paid media were critically important. Billboards, lawn signs, banners, and fliers were also essential to gaining visibility and buzz.



Campaign Design



Every community is different, and every successful solarize campaign reflects its community. In some areas, social media was the driving force for our outreach. In others, billboards and community calendars were the main way to get the word out.



In all of our best campaigns, events were scheduled well in advance, partnerships were established before Solarize launched, and volunteers received thorough training. Planning meetings with partners were helped identify the best events, partners, and stories.

In every case, when the community was aware of the technology, the campaigns were more successful. Time, effort, and resources spent to inform leaders and others about the solar options were well spent.

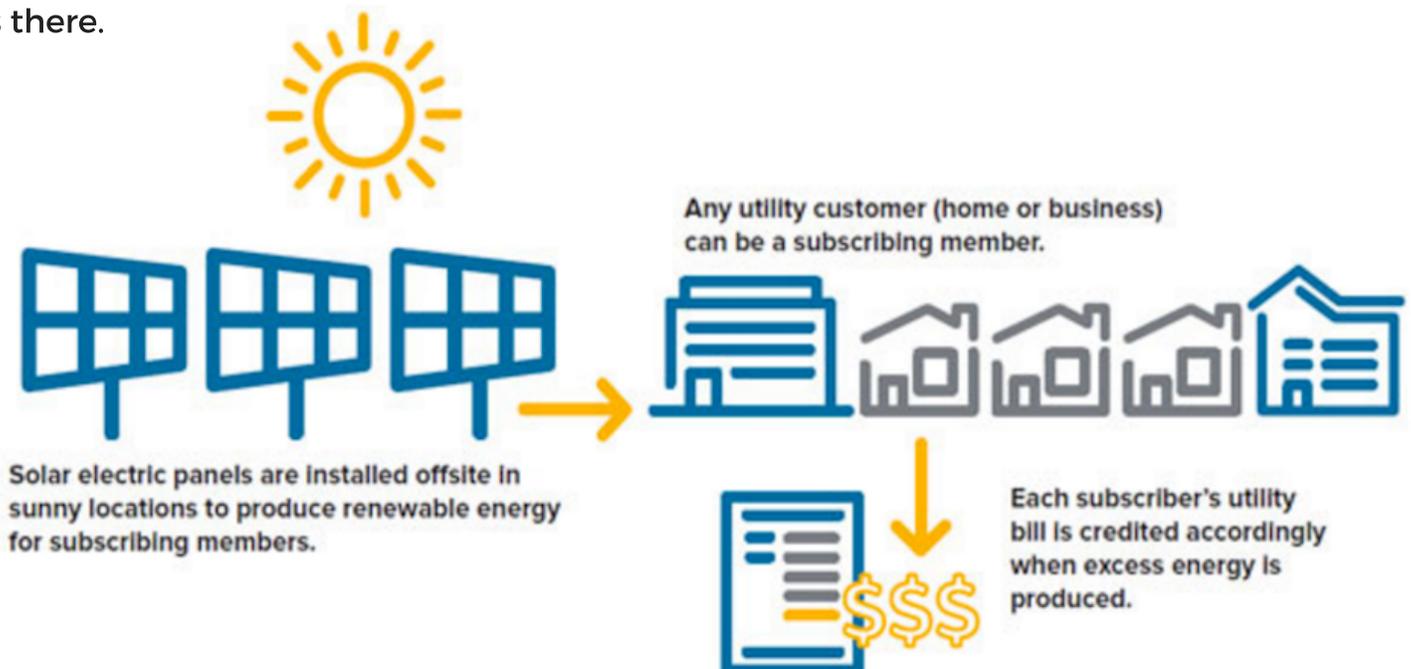
Emerging Opportunities

In 2015 Governor Cuomo opened New York's doors to Community Shared Solar (CSS). In doing so, he paved the way for renters and those who can't put solar panels on their property to get their power from the sun.

With CSS, the panels are side by side at a nearby sunny location. Participants receive a portion of the solar energy produced by the solar farm, which is credited seamlessly to their utility bill each month. Customers can easily cover 100% of their electricity usage this way and can either subscribe to a solar farm's energy or purchase their own panels at the solar farm.

CSS could throw solar wide open for most customers including renters, homeowners, businesses, non-profits, low-income residents, students. In 2017 more CSS projects began to come online, and the RenewableNY team launched our first Community Solarize campaigns.

We learned a number of lessons. First, with CSS campaigns there's a lot more information and learning about the grid that must happen for customers to become comfortable with the technology. It is not immediately apparent to most how it will work for homes and business can get credited for the energy their panels create if they're not directly connected to the array. Second, there is a lot of interest interested customers sign contracts at a higher rate than traditional rooftop solar. Our initial campaigns showed us that more education and outreach must be done, but that the interest and commitment is there.



Energy Corps Interns



RenewableNY's Energy Corps interns were critical to many of our campaigns. They fueled much of our behind-the-scenes work as well as providing enthusiastic faces for Solarize. Interns received extensive training and support, including:

- Solar industry
- NYS solar policy
- Outreach
- Public speaking
- Time management
- Fostering diversity in the workplace
- Grant management
- Design/marketing
- Career Connections

Good internship programs require a tremendous amount of care and feeding, but pay dividends in people-power, energy, and community investment.

"ULTIMATELY THIS INTERNSHIP HAS INSPIRED ME TO PURSUE RENEWABLE ENERGY AND ENVIRONMENTALISM."
ABBY YATSKO,
CORNELL COOPERATIVE EXTENSION, SUMMER 2017



Conclusion

A solar community is a strong community. Over the past three years we've been honored to partner with some of the strongest communities, organizations, elected officials, and solar companies in New York State. We're looking forward to continuing the work to transition New York State to 100% renewable energy through locally-based campaigns, and hope that others can learn from our successes and challenges.

Have questions? Want more resources and information about running a Solarize campaign (including a community toolbox, sample outreach materials, time to talk about how it could work for you, or to troubleshoot)? Interested in something you've read in this report? Call NYSERDA to get started. And once you've connected with them, reach out to us. katherine@catskillmountntainkeeper.org



RenewableNY Solar Outreach Initiative By the Numbers

748

Contracts
Signed

6.1 +

MW Solar Energy
Under Contract

153

CSS Contracts

94

EnergyCorps
Interns

24

Solarize
Campaigns

294

Documented
Press Clips

300 +

Community
Outreach Events

10,731

Minimum number
of volunteer hours