

## Fall 2015 Solarize Community RFA Frequently Asked Questions

1. If a community is selected for Solarize, what would prevent a homeowner from contracting with an installer who was not part of the Solarize program? Or to put it another way, is the reduced installation cost expected under this program the only incentive for homeowner participation? That is, would a homeowner who contracted with an installer outside the Solarize program be eligible for the same REF and REG grants as one within the program? There is nothing to stop a homeowner or business owner to contract with another solar installer not participating in Solarize and benefit from the available incentives if they are eligible. The program is not a temporary monopoly on the municipality. The program is designed to offer a below state average cost to homeowners and businesses because the selected installer(s) can achieve economies of scale with bulk purchases of equipment. The other program benefit, outside of price, is that by talking to neighbors and encouraging them to go solar through the program, the cost drops for everyone to the next tiers (there are three tiers). The program fosters and encourages neighbors to talk to each other. Lastly, and perhaps more importantly, the program also increases education and awareness of solar PV.

2. Are the solar installers selected on the basis of least cost alone? In other words, is there something in your selection process that favors local installers, or is there a mechanism in your process that prevents the Solarize program from negatively affecting local small-business installers who may not be able to compete on price alone with the large installers? Solar installers are not chosen on cost alone. They also need to demonstrate ability to respond in a timely manner to leads, provide quality customer service, and demonstrate experience with installing PV, among others. The installer RFA is available on the OER Solarize website for additional scoring criteria. The top 3 installers will be interviewed as well so there is an opportunity to meet them in person. However, as I mentioned, we are allowing communities to select up to 3 installers if they want. This may encourage more installers to form a consortium (two or more installers partnering together to submit an application).

3. Can the application deadline be extended?

The Request for Applications for Communities to participate in the fall round of Solarize RI is due on September 22, 2015. Unfortunately, for many reasons this deadline cannot be extended. The public announcement of the selected Solarize communities is scheduled for September 28<sup>th</sup> and the Governor is expected to make the announcement at the press event. In addition, the timeline for the Solarize program is tight because the signup period for the program is expected to end on February 15, 2016. One of the primary lessons learned from the Solarize pilot was that we needed to run a Fall Solarize campaign with a deadline after Christmas but before large amounts of snow are expected. Those lessons learned were built into the Fall Solarize timeline.

4. What is PV Friendly Zoning?

Last year at the November 19, 2014 Municipal Energy Working Group meeting, OER presented information regarding PV friendly zoning and provided examples of zoning language as well as guidance documents from RI and CT. If your planner attended this meeting they may have copies of these documents. Unfortunately, these materials are too large to post here so please contact Shauna Beland at [shauna.beland@energy.ri.com](mailto:shauna.beland@energy.ri.com) to learn more or request the guidance documents.

Here are some highlights from the presentation last year. More specifically, PV Friendly zoning could be that PV is allowed for all accessory usages:

## Permitted Zoning Districts

- **Allowed for all accessory usage**
  - “Rooftop photovoltaic solar (PV) is permitted in all zoning districts – as an accessory use on any lawfully permitted properties – upon issuance of proper permits.”

	R-1	R-2	C	I	P
Roof-Mounted Solar Energy	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Small-scale Ground-Mounted Solar Energy	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y



Small scale is typically defined in Rhode Island as solar systems 1-25kW. In addition, the zoning language try to avoid prohibitions for PV projects:

## Things to Avoid...

- **Building Height Restrictions:**
  - Exempt from height restrictions like other necessary equipment (e.g. antennae, chimneys, etc.)
  - Same angle as the building's sloped roof
  - Grandfather in buildings in areas re-zoned for smaller structures
- **Prohibiting/limiting solar visibility**
  - Seeing other residents with solar is what 'sells'/normalizes solar
  - From busy city streets
  - Outside of historical districts (if deemed appropriate)
- **Zoning that inhibits future solar access**

