



Principles and Policies for Low and Moderate-Income Solar

Part 5:

Presenting Solar Information to LMI Consumers

Presenter: Warren Leon, CESA

Moderator: Nate Hausman, CESA

November 17, 2017

This content is provided to assist teams participating in the Solar in Your Community Challenge, a prize program sponsored by the U.S. Department of Energy Solar Energy Technologies Office (SETO). This content is free for general public use.

Learning Objectives

- To understand how well-presented consumer information can increase LMI solar adoption and customer satisfaction
- To understand how to present consumer information in the most useful ways



Why Good Information Is Especially Important for LMI Consumers


1. LMI residents are less likely to have friends and acquaintances who have already gone solar
2. LMI consumers may be reluctant to trust utilities and government officials
3. A bad decision on solar could put their financial position at risk
 - They need good information to help them make good decisions
 - It is essential that they know the potential risks as well as the potential benefits



When Does Solar Make Sense for LMI Consumers?

- Participating LMI consumers should have the potential for meaningful financial benefits and low risk of financial loss or negative financial complications
- Information should help steer LMI consumers to projects and programs that fit that profile





Seven Recommendations for Producing Effective Solar Information for LMI Consumers

1. Present Solar in an Even-Handed Manner

The goal isn't to sell solar; it's to help LMI consumers make sound choices

- Don't only present the virtues of installing solar
 - Explain the potential risks
- Explain why solar might not be a sound choice in some cases
- Help LMI consumers understand the need for caution and the range of questions to ask before making a final decision



Of course, the information strategy depends on the value proposition of the particular solar offer

2. Target Marketing: Consider Specific Audiences and Specific Solar Strategies

Generic materials are probably not sufficient

- Different markets need different information and different dissemination strategies
 - Homeowners vs renters
 - Renters who pay for utilities vs renters who don't
 - Multi-family housing vs single-family housing
 - Mobile homes
 - Senior citizens vs young families vs singles, etc.
- Where possible, focus on those programs, strategies, and incentives that will be most financially beneficial for LMI consumers
 - E.g., focus on the specific Solar in Your Community Challenge program more than generic solar information

3. Make Information Easy to Understand, Visually Appealing, and Easy to Use



- Speak directly to consumers in a clear, direct manner that assumes no prior knowledge
- Help readers focus on the most important information by including short lists of key points
- For online information
 - Emulate the best commercial websites
 - Divide the material into short topics with links to each section
- Use other strategies
 - Printed materials
 - Partnerships

4. Partner with Trusted Groups and Individuals

- Government officials and solar program managers may not be best situated to promote programs in low-income communities
- Trusted allies, such as low-income outreach and advocacy groups, community action agencies, community groups, religious institutions, and other service institutions, can reinforce mutual trust and improve outreach and marketing



5. Emphasize Dissemination as Much as Materials Development



- The best information is not effective if it doesn't reach its intended audience
- Do media outreach, including through social media
- Encourage others to link to and promote the information
 - Utilities, municipalities, solar installers, solar advocates, energy organizations, consumer groups, community groups

6. Give High Priority to Solar Financing

- Can be a confusing area for consumers; it is easy for LMI consumers to make decisions they will later regret
- Provide information about the types of finance options available (leases, loans, and power purchases agreements)
 - The advantages and disadvantages of each
 - Which is best in which circumstances
- Suggest questions to ask lenders and installers



7. Draw on Pre-existing Resources

- US Department of Energy
- National Renewable Energy Laboratory
- States
- CESA
- Utilities
- Solar Energy Industries Association
- Universities
- Nonprofit organizations
- Commercial websites

- Link to them
- Adapt or modify their materials (with permission)



A Resource to Consider

- George Washington University Solar Institute, in conjunction with CESA, produced three short videos:
 - Rooftop Solar Financing 101
 - Choosing a Solar Installer
 - Will Solar Panels Save You Money?
- Provide even-handed information for consumers
- Funded by the US DOE Solar Energy Technologies Office
- Find them on the CESA website
- Link to them or place them on your website

Possible Topics for Solar Information

WHAT IS A SOLAR PV SYSTEM?

- How the technology works
- Components of a typical system
- Different types of PV systems
- Solar+storage
- The advantages and disadvantages of different modules, inverters, mounting, and battery systems
- How/if the PV system will function during a grid power outage
- Safety issues, including fire safety
- System maintenance

IS SOLAR RIGHT FOR YOU?

- Reasons why people go solar
- Deciding whether to invest in a PV system, including reasons why it may not make sense to proceed with solar
- The relationship between energy efficiency and solar
- Whether a building is right for solar
- Information and tools for estimating appropriate PV system size
- Information and tools for quantifying the potential environmental and financial benefits of a PV system
- Community solar

FINANCING A PV SYSTEM

- The differences between solar leases, loans, and PPAs
- Questions to ask before entering into a solar financing agreement

THE SOLAR MARKET IN THE STATE AND MARKET TRENDS

- Statistics and other information on solar capacity and specific solar installations
- Solarize and other solar purchase aggregation programs
- Materials on specific market segments, such as condominium owners, renters, low-income households

SOLAR INCENTIVES AND REGULATIONS

- Federal investment tax credit and how to determine eligibility
- State tax credits, rebate programs, and other solar incentives
- State and federal laws that impact solar installations

SOLAR RIGHTS AND ZONING REGULATIONS

- Permitting and interconnection
- Renewable energy certificates (RECs) and who owns the environmental attributes from a PV system
- Net metering and how solar PV impacts a consumer's utility bill

HOW TO CHOOSE A SOLAR CONTRACTOR

- A list of solar installation companies in the state
- Reviews/ratings of installation companies
- What to look for in a solar installation contract
- Warranties and insurance
- A PV project checklist

KNOW YOUR RIGHTS

- State and federal consumer protection measures
- How to report problematic solar marketing or problems with an installation

OTHER USEFUL RESOURCES

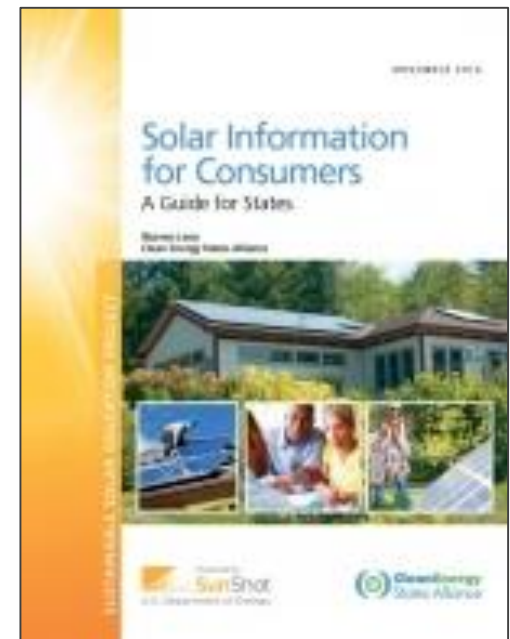
Models to Consider

Described in CESA's Guide on *Solar Information for Consumers*

- A dedicated solar consumer information website
- A comprehensive guide
- List of solar installers
- Solar resource maps and calculators
- Solar statistics

Approaches that may be especially appropriate

- A brief low-budget guide
- A focus on solar financing
- Materials on special topics (e.g., community solar, solar for multi-family housing, solar for mobile homes)



Thank you for attending our webinar

Warren Leon
Executive Director, CESA
wleon@cleanegroup.org

Nate Hausman
Project Director, CESA
nate@cleanegroup.org

Webinar instructors will be available for one-on-one consultations with Challenge participants through **virtual office hours**. To schedule a consultation, contact Diana Chace at diana@cleanegroup.org

Slides and recordings from this webinar series are available on CESA's website at:
www.cesa.org/projects/sustainable-solar/solar-in-your-community-challenge-webinar-series



www.cesa.org