

Program Highlights

- ▶ *Solarize Portland* is a successful new program delivery method for creating demand and installation of solar technology.
- ▶ In six months, 120 solar electric systems were installed through *Solarize* by reducing the primary market barriers for homeowners—more than three times the number of installations completed in Portland in 2008.
- ▶ *Solarize* effectively partnered with a local nonprofit experienced in engaging citizens.
- ▶ Energy Trust provided participants standard program incentives of \$2.25/watt.
- ▶ Buzz generated by *Solarize Portland* applied downward pressure on PV system prices and contributed to a 320% increase in area non-*Solarize* installations during the project timeline.

Solarize Portland

ENERGY TRUST OF OREGON

Energy Trust of Oregon, in collaboration with the Southeast Uplift Neighborhood Coalition, created *Solarize Portland*, a community, group purchase initiative to help residents overcome the financial and logistical barriers to installing solar energy systems. *Solarize* resulted in the installation of solar energy on 120 Portland homes in just six months—more than three times the number of systems installed in the city in 2008. The group purchasing and RFP process delivered costs 20% lower than the average price in Portland at the time. *Solarize* not only provided an attractive financial proposition but also provided workshops, solar experts, a contractor with set pricing tiers, and free assessments. The 120 installations added 347 kW of new photovoltaic capacity in Portland; they are estimated to produce 344,500 kWh of electricity per year.

The Need for a Community-Led Program

The barriers to installing residential photovoltaic systems can be many: cost, discomfort with contractors and the sales process, unfamiliarity with solar technology, financial complexity, and inertia. In Portland, the pace of installations had been relatively slow (38 in all of 2008), and the price of photovoltaic systems had been high compared with the rest of the state. In addition, the timeline required to move a potential solar customer from interest to installation is often very long: a 2007 market study determined that most Oregonians thought about installing solar for over two years before they finally took action. *Solarize* was able to draw many residents to its program and substantially reduce the lengthy decision-making and installation timeline by removing or otherwise addressing many of these barriers. *Solarize* provided free site assessments and offered an affordable, set price for program participants through a single installer. In addition, Southeast Uplift engaged citizens directly, giving homeowners the opportunity to determine how energy is produced within their community.



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Recipe for Success

Solarize was designed to be simple to engage and enroll in. It far surpassed its goal of enrolling 50 homeowners and achieving 25 installations through the program. Critical to the success of the program was the collaboration of Energy Trust, a statewide nonprofit organization with deep solar expertise and market familiarity, with Southeast Uplift, a local community organization experienced in engaging citizens and implementing community initiatives. This unique and collaborative program featured the following key elements:

- Grassroots outreach and promotion by neighborhood volunteers
- Competitively selected contractor with set pricing tiers
- Easy enrollment and participation process
- Educational workshops
- Free site assessments for all enrollees to determine suitability
- Energy Trust incentive of \$2.25/watt, plus state and federal tax credits
- Limited-time enrollment period
- *Solarize* resulted in 120 solar electric installations within six months and provided 18 professional jobs.

Implementing the Model

Energy Trust provided its standard residential solar electric incentive at that time of \$2.25/watt to the participants of the *Solarize Portland* project, with an average per-project incentive of \$6,300. At the installed cost of \$6.80/watt for *Solarize* participants, Energy Trust's incentive covered an average of 70% of the above-market cost of a given installation, after state and federal tax credits. Energy Trust claimed 15 out of 20 years' of Renewable Energy Certificates (RECs) for each installation, for a total anticipated acquisition of approximately 4,900 RECs.

Given the unique collaboration, delivery costs for the project were modest. One Energy Trust staff person led Energy Trust's portion of the project and delivered several educational workshops as part of the organization's normal program activities. Outreach was driven by Southeast Uplift and a corps of dedicated volunteers from its affiliated neighborhoods.

By helping develop *Solarize Portland*, Energy Trust was part of creating a successful new program delivery method consisting of five simple elements:

- RFP to enable bulk pricing
- Collaboration with a trusted, sponsoring organization
- An easy participation process
- Simple educational plan
- Limited-time signup period

Solarize Portland and the success of subsequent *Solarize* projects have demonstrated the effectiveness of the model in creating demand and driving installations. The City of Portland, a U.S. Department of Energy Solar America City, is providing planning, coordination, and implementation support for four additional *Solarize* efforts in Portland neighborhoods. Energy Trust's subsequent support of *Solarize Pendleton*, a project in the rural city of Pendleton, Oregon, and a similar project for employees of Columbia Sportswear Company, shows that the approach is highly replicable and can be adapted to work in a variety of settings.

Judges' Comments

Portland might not have the most sunlight, but it's been able to move ahead with a major solar initiative in Solarize Portland. This grassroots effort, facilitated with a partnership between the statewide nonprofit and local neighborhoods, moved ahead in a really short time, using a relatively modest subsidy to command a good price for residents. The model is potentially replicable by communities across the U.S., and is particularly important to study in light of declining state incentives and challenges to the PACE residential financing program.



About Energy Trust of Oregon

Energy Trust of Oregon is an independent nonprofit organization dedicated to helping Oregonians benefit from saving energy and generating renewable energy. Its services, cash incentives, and energy solutions have helped participating customers of Portland General Electric, Pacific Power, NW Natural, and Cascade Natural Gas save nearly \$600 million on energy bills. Its work helps keep energy costs as low as possible and builds a sustainable energy future.

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