

CASE STUDY | SOLARIZE

IN MARCH 2012, [Solarize West Linn-Lake Oswego](#) (SWLLO) was launched. SWLLO is a community-led initiative, supported by both cities, Clackamas County, and a grant from the city of Portland's Bureau of Planning and Sustainability (Portland is where the [Solarize](#) model originated). The grant, which was awarded to Portland from the US Department of Energy, has helped other communities to simplify the process of going solar through a combination of educational workshops and bulk purchase of solar panels.

The cities of West Linn (population 25,392) and Lake Oswego (population 37,046) prepared a grant application to the city of Portland in partnership with Clackamas County (population 380,207). The county administered the grant for both SWLLO and for the county's Solarize program.

SWLLO selected [Sunlight Solar Energy, Inc.](#) as the installation contractor for the program. The cities of Lake Oswego and West Linn contributed money to hire a project coordinator for six months for the Solarize projects and have played an active role in marketing and outreach for the Solarize program, providing meeting space, working with network of neighborhood associations, securing space at farmers markets, and sharing information on the program with permitting and building inspectors.

While the cities provided support, the initiative was very much community led: "One thing that made us a little different from a lot of the Solarize programs is that we really were an independent group of people, not associated with a non-profit, etc.," said Glen Friedman, the Solarize Program Manager, noting that this could be a challenge for outreach as the group did not have established databases or mailings list.

To get residents to attend workshops (SWLLO held up to two a month, beginning in March 2012), SWLLO found leaving flyers on doors and direct mail were the most effective. Outreach at farmers market has also been really important and volunteers are always sure to have solar technology on display to draw people in. "The thing with solar panels that we've discovered is that people see them, but it is always on a roof, so they don't really know what they look like, so people can say 'oh, that's what it really is,' and it makes a big difference!" Friedman said.

Of the volunteer led effort Susan Millhauser, Lake Oswego's Sustainability Coordinator noted, "It's been nice having community members out there marketing to their neighbors, rather than the local government or the contractor. That peer-to-peer marketing is working really well."

SWLLO has been extended twice – in part due to interest and in part to capitalize on the increased interest generated during the sunnier summer months. West Linn and Lake Oswego residents can enroll through October 2012, and the program's final workshop will correspond with the American Solar Energy Society's [National Solar Home Tour](#) on October 6. As of August 2012, the program had 180 registrants, 88 of whom had qualified for further site evaluations. Of these 12 homes had completed installations for a total of 47.43 kilowatts of installed capacity, and another 22 homes were in the pipeline, having completed site assessments and received bids.

Of the registrants who signed up but did not qualify, one of the major challenges in both cities, though primarily Lake Oswego, is their heavy urban tree canopy. To receive Energy Trust of Oregon incentives, a property must get at least 75 percent of the solar radiation level for the Portland area and in Lake Oswego, there is an urban tree canopy ordinance. "It's more about if it is right for your site. If it's not, it's not," Millhauser said. "We're not encouraging people to cut down large shade trees to put up solar panels."



Homeowners in Oregon City, Oregon, who participated in Growing Solar Clackamas County stand in front of their solar installation with a representative from Sunlight Solar Energy, Inc.

Clackamas County – one of the three counties in the Portland metropolitan area and the county in which West Linn and Lake Oswego are located – also supported a Solarize campaign along with the county’s Oregon State University extension service – [Growing Solar Clackamas County](#) – which ran from mid-January to mid-May 2012.



Clackamas County has a 67kw array on its Development Services Building, seen here with Mt. Hood in the background.

The Solarize initiative held more than a dozen community workshops and conducted outreach at farmers markets and other community events. The workshops conducted through the Solarize program had between 20 and 80 participants. Over 500 people registered for a home solar assessment and

87 contracts were signed, resulting in 306 kw of installed capacity.

“Some folks told us they had been thinking of solar for awhile, and who were excited to participate--the light bulb goes off that now is a good time,” noted Eben Polk, a Clackamas County sustainability analyst.

The Growing Solar program was not without challenges. The citizen steering committee originally selected two contractors to work with the initiative – something which turned out to be both a challenge and a benefit when one of the contractors went out of business part way through the installation phase. Although this was a highly credible contractor that had spearheaded several other similar initiatives, their closure left about 20 percent of the participating homeowners in a difficult situation. The county along partners such as Solar Oregon, the other contractor, SolarWorld, and the Energy Trust of Oregon, worked to mitigate the issue.

The county also has installations on its buildings – a 67kw array on the Development Services Building and a smaller array on one of the Sheriff’s facilities. The county is - currently working with faculty at Clackamas Community College, which has a renewable energy program, to offer opportunities for students to perform solar site assessments on more of its properties.

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