

Pima Association of Governments: Regional Solar Plan

Tucson, AZ

Population: 980,263

Size: 9,187 square miles

www.pagnet.org

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Founded in 1972, the Pima Association of Governments (PAG) is a federally designated metropolitan planning organization, comprised of nine member jurisdictions in the greater Tucson region. PAG represents an environmentally and culturally diverse region, including the city of Tucson, surrounding towns and several Native American Reservations.

PAG and Solar

In 2008, Tucson was designated a Solar America City by U.S. DOE. The region enjoys around 300 days of sunshine a year and is home to one of the largest solar power arrays in the nation. In early 2009, the City of Tucson approached PAG to assist with their Solar America Cities grant. The City was charged with hosting community outreach events to educate businesses and consumers on the benefits of solar. In an effort to assist the city and facilitate the development of solar in the region, PAG and the City of Tucson established the Solar Partnership. The Partnership is membership based and includes installers, manufacturers, end users, municipalities and government agencies based upon a flexible fee structure. During meetings, members focus on outreach and education to the community as well as working on solar energy legislation. Currently, the Solar Partnership has more than 40 members.

Shortly after the formation of the Solar Partnership, PAG and the City of Tucson developed the Greater Tucson Solar Development Plan, a component of PAG's

Overall Work Plan, to assist and accelerate solar deployment in Southern Arizona. Funded through the Solar Partnership, the *Plan* is comprised of twelve primary stages designed to establish a viable market for solar energy; help the region compete effectively with other western states; stimulate investment and workforce growth in the region; and secure the participation of key stakeholders.²⁸ For example, several of the stages include establishing rules and regulations to support healthy solar energy development and markets; establishing the financial incentives necessary to support renewable energy investments; and improving the ability of municipal governments to facilitate the solar energy development.²⁹ Several of the *Plan's* goals have been met or exceeded. The Solar Partnership meets monthly to discuss and update the Solar Plan to reflect these achievements and continue to develop the solar market in Southern Arizona.

PAG's efforts to develop the solar market in Southern Arizona have also benefited from a fairly generous state incentive program. However, these incentives, coupled with other market forces, assisted in an

oversaturation of the region's solar installation market. As more installers flocked to the region, the quality of the installations began to suffer.

The local utility, Tucson Electric Power (TEP), called upon PAG to work with local installers on the Southern Arizona Solar Standards Board (SASSB) for assistance in maintaining quality solar installations.

The SASSB, established originally by five local solar installers, works to inform consumers and



Pima Association of Governments

Solar Partnership Vision is "to support a diverse and vibrant business, educational, and governmental community that is fully engaged in making southern Arizona one of the preeminent leaders in the world for the development and utilization of solar energy."

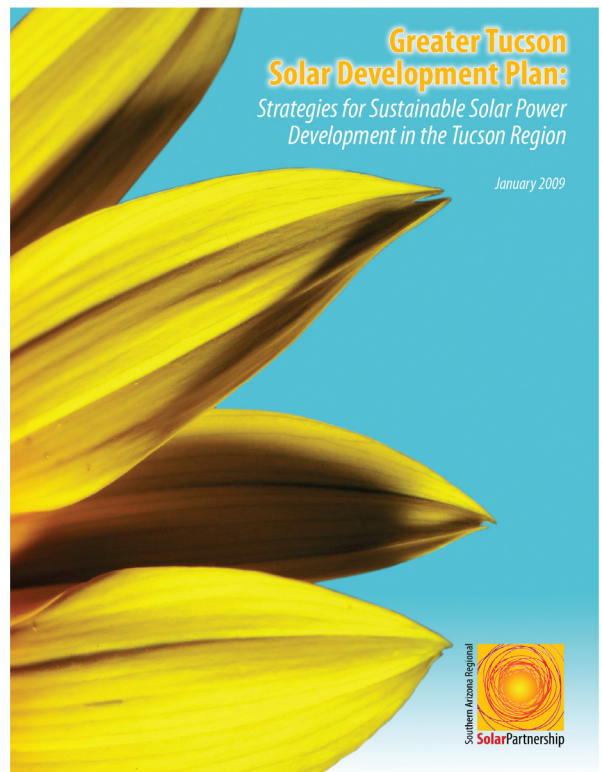
– Southern Arizona Regional Solar Partnerships Brochure

rank local installers based upon a system of best practices. The SASSB provides a set of goals to help installers attain accreditation. These goals refer specifically to established best practices associated with solar installation, such as having at least one NABCEP (North American Board of Certified Energy Practitioners) certified person on staff. Installers who successfully achieve the outlined goals receive the SASSB's stamp of approval and are listed on the SASSB's website as accredited installers. Companies that do not currently meet the outlined standards, but want to be included in SSB's database, are provided one year to meet these standards with the assistance of the SASSB.

Lessons Learned

The SASSB works to enhance and improve the solar business climate in Southern Arizona by promoting best practices, educating the general public and assisting solar businesses looking to install long-lasting, quality installations. Because the Tucson region benefits from one of the largest solar power arrays in the nation, it has experienced success through its solar programs. The implementation of such programs has taught PAG that:

- It is important to maintain the quality of solar installation throughout the region, while still attracting projects through state incentives;
- A system of best practices is helpful to inform consumers and installers about the benefits of solar and how installers can attain accreditation; and
- Providing incentives to installers to follow best practices, leads to the installation of long-lasting, quality installations.



PAG's Greater Tucson Solar Development Plan.

Credit: PAG

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