


SHARING SUCCESS: **EMERGING APPROACHES** **TO ROOFTOP PERMITTING**

INTERSTATE RENEWABLE ENERGY COUNCIL, INC. (IREC), AUGUST 2012

In May 2012, IREC issued *Sharing Success: Emerging Approaches to Rooftop Permitting*, available at www.irecusa.org/sharing-success. The report is intended to facilitate discussion about obstacles in the rooftop solar permitting process, and to provide concrete examples of ways in which local and state governments and other entities have overcome these challenges. In addition, the report contains an Annotated Bibliography (pp. 46-51) with additional resources. This short, quick reference highlights the report's conclusions.

Improving the Permitting Process



Pre-Application – Access to information on solar permit requirements and procedures (pp. 19-23)

- **Checklists** – One document that lists all of the items and information that an applicant needs to prepare for the permitting process
- **Guidance documents** – Comprehensive resources that cover the technical requirements, process and other elements of the solar installation process in greater detail
- **Web site** – One-stop location to share information with the solar industry and other stakeholders, including links to electronic resources

Application submittal – Application forms, fees and review procedures (pp. 23-39)

- **Solar permit application form** – To identify the precise information needed to process a solar installation permit, sometimes developed in combination with a solar permit checklist
- **Application review process**
 - Expedited review for pre-qualified projects, plans or installers
 - Over-the-counter submittal and review for qualified systems
 - Online or electronic submittal and review
- **Solar permit fees** – Designed to fully compensate permitting authority while also keeping solar development costs to a minimum

Inspections – Scheduling inspections and inspector training (pp. 39-43)

- **Inspection scheduling**
 - Frequency – keeping inspections to the minimum required to maintain safety and reliability (ideally one inspection)
 - Timing – allowing for a reasonable time window for scheduling, if not a precise time
 - Coordination with utility interconnection process, if possible
- **Inspector training and resources** – To enable inspectors to know what to look for in a solar installation in an effort to make the solar inspection process more effective

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Framework for Improvements

- Improve **consistency** of technical and procedural requirements across a region or the U.S.
- Increase **clarity and transparency** of permitting requirements at the local level.
- Implement **simplified** standards and processes focused only on solar installations.
- **Reduce the amount of time** necessary to process permit applications, while also maintaining high levels of safety and reliability.
- Design **fee structures** to fully compensate permitting authority while also keeping solar development costs at a minimum.

Key Principles for Change

- **Responsibility** for change should be shared between permitting authorities and the solar industry.
- **Changes** to permitting policies should benefit municipal governments, solar installers and their customers.

Implementing Permitting Changes

Local governments typically control the permitting process.

- Sometimes difficult balance between government's needs and demands, and encouraging solar energy and economic development.
- It is possible to develop procedures that benefit both the municipal staff and the solar community.

State governments may have a role to play. (pp. 7-13)

- States may implement statutes or regulations mandating permitting reforms or may issue non-mandatory guidance documents to advise local agencies on reforms.
- Advantages – allows for mandatory, uniform change that can take effect immediately.
- Disadvantages – without local buy-in, may encounter local resistance and backlash.

Regional approaches can be effective and have several benefits. (pp. 14-18)

- Standardized permitting requirements and processes across a geographically significant region provide benefits to both permitting authorities and solar industry. Consistency increases the efficiency of the permitting process.
- May promote regional and local economic development.
- Encourage collaboration and cooperation, and may leverage existing regional relationships.
- Take advantage of administrative economies of scale.

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