



Solar Ready II

Photo: Solar Ready II team

CASE STUDY

SOLAR
OUTREACH



PARTNERSHIP

Solar Ready II

Solar Ready II (SRII) is a partnership of the [National Association of Regional Councils \(NARC\)](#), [Mid-America Regional Council \(MARC\)](#) and [Meister Consultants Group \(MCG\)](#). It is supported by the [U.S. Department of Energy SunShot Initiative Rooftop Solar Challenge II \(RSCII\)](#) grant.¹ The goal of RSCII is “to deploy, at the regional and national scale innovative, local government-level solutions towards eliminating market barriers and lowering the non-hardware balance of system costs (‘soft costs’) of grid-tied solar photovoltaics (PV).”²

Launched in October 2013, SRII uses the broad impact and influence of regional planning councils

(RPCs) to provide direct assistance to local governments, helping them implement strategies to measurably improve market conditions for solar. Ten RPCs were selected to participate in SRII. The catchment area of these councils represents well over 200 local governments, containing nearly 18.7 million people across thirteen states and the District of Columbia.

Resources and technical assistance provided to participating RPCs through SRII come at an important time. Energy policy has been identified as a leading priority for many regions across the country. Changes in federal and state policies, rising energy demand, price fluctuations, and shifts in the traditional mix of energy supplies are having the greatest impact at the regional level. As a result, many regions are interested in pursuing solar energy but are unsure where to start. For participating RPCs, SRII provides a valuable foundation for initiating the conversation and building support for solar development with their local governments and other stakeholders.

“Solar Ready II is an exemplary project showcasing regionalism, cooperation, and the power of local actions.”

**Chuck Bean, Executive Director,
Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments**

REGIONAL PLANNING COUNCILS PARTICIPATING IN SRII	POPULATION OF ENGAGED JURISDICTIONS ⁷
Central New York Regional Planning and Development Board	349,673
Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission	1,766,812
Maricopa Association of Governments	2,010,960
Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments	4,721,850
Mid-America Regional Council	1,209,864
North Central Texas Council of Governments	4,146,346
Northwestern Indiana Regional Planning Commission	358,217
Ohio-Kentucky-Indiana Regional Council of Governments	1,900,330
Southwest Florida Regional Planning Council	791,699
Tampa Bay Regional Planning Council	1,505,490
TOTAL POPULATION REPRESENTED IN SRII	18,761,241

“We are seeing solar energy deployed across the U.S. at an unprecedented rate, and regional councils play an important role in accelerating this growth, particularly at the local level. Regional councils have long been a trusted voice in their communities and are able to gather local elected officials, solar industry representatives, utilities, planners, and other local government personnel in the same room, get them interested, and even excited about adopting solar best management practices.”

**Joanna Turner, Executive Director,
National Association of Regional Councils**

The [Best Management Practice \(BMP\) framework](#), discussed below, is a model, not only for RPCs but also for individual local governments that are looking for ways to support or advance regional adoption of solar technologies.

Background

SRII builds upon the success of [Solar Ready KC](#), a 2011 RSC project. Led by MARC, Solar Ready KC brought together the regional council, a local utility, and five jurisdictional partners to develop a compre-

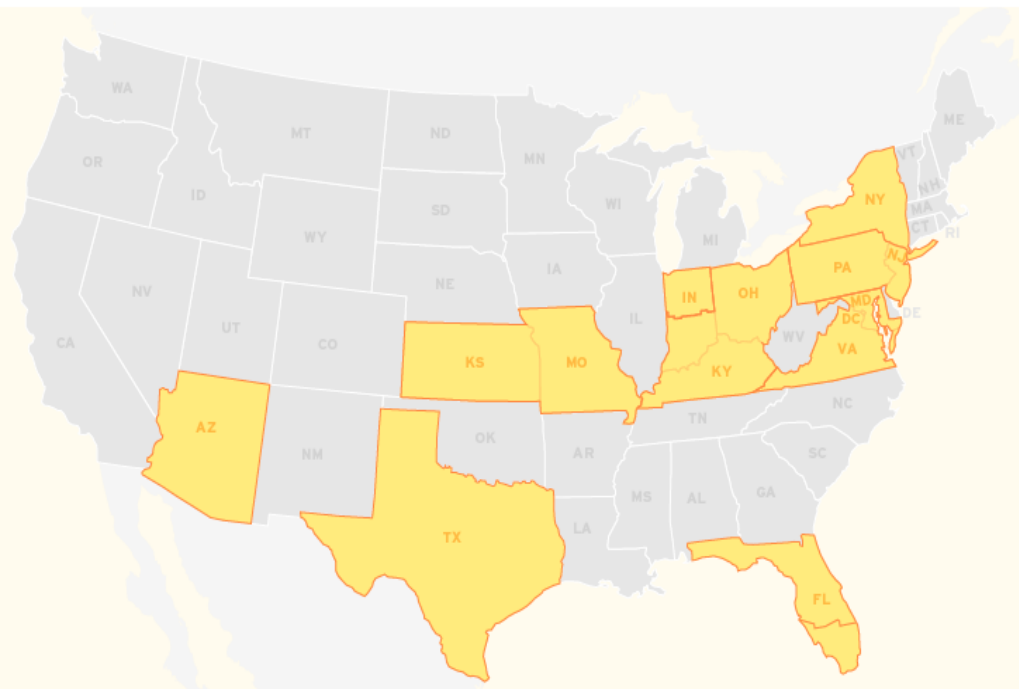


“A group of planners, inspectors, and building commissioners at the Northwestern Indiana Regional Planning Commission Solar Ready II Workshop receive a rooftop tour of solar PV installations at the Porter County Career and Technical Center, a vocational education school to which Fronius USA donated an installation for the students to learn about solar technology.”

hensive guide to solar BMPs aimed at reducing soft costs and improving market conditions in the Kansas City region.³ The resulting guide provides a framework for municipalities to streamline solar planning and

SOLAR READY II REGIONAL PARTNERS

- Central New York Regional Planning and Development Board >
- Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission >
- Maricopa Association of Governments >
- Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments >
- Mid-America Regional Council >
- North Central Texas Council of Governments >
- Northwestern Indiana Regional Planning Commission >
- Ohio-Kentucky-Indiana Regional Council of Governments >
- Southwest Florida Regional Planning Council >
- Tampa Bay Regional Planning Council >



permitting processes, explore financing options, and identify their own best practices. As Georgia Nesselrode, program director of Local Government Services at MARC, explains: “We wanted to bring what we had learned through Solar Ready KC to a national level. Solar Ready II is an extension of what we were able to accomplish in the Kansas City metro region.”

Benefits of a Regional Approach

SRII provides insight into the value of a regional approach to solar and the powerful roles that RPCs can play in reaching and supporting a large number of local governments.

An RPC “is a multi-service entity with state- and locally-defined boundaries that delivers a variety of federal, state, and local programs while carrying out its function as a planning organization, technical assistance provider, and ‘visionary’ to its member local governments.”⁴ Multiple cities, towns, and/or counties make up an RPC catchment area, making it an ideal avenue for the widespread distribution of educational and outreach tools.

The most important function of an RPC is to foster communication, coordination, and collaboration among and across their member jurisdictions in a politically neutral setting. And because RPCs are aware of the specific needs, challenges, or other special considerations of member jurisdictions, they are uniquely suited to provide customized tools or technical assistance. RPCs are natural conveners and bring a multiplier effect through their ability to reach large numbers of communities and build networks, thus expediting the distribution of resources. As Chad Laurent, senior consultant and general counsel at MCG, points out, “Regional planning councils know who the stakeholders are; they can connect the dots on the ground; and they are a trusted source of information, training and resources.”

“The City of Gladstone has integrated solar permitting and best practices guidelines into the fabric of its permitting process largely due to the involvement of the Solar Ready II initiative. Working with a regional partner (Mid-America Regional Council) on the checklist process has provided more certainty and confidence for solar contractors working within our city limits.”

**Chris Helmer, Planning Specialist,
City of Gladstone, Missouri**

Regional Impacts at a Local Level

While SRII is an effort to support local government solar initiatives through regional planning councils, successful regional solar programs do not necessarily need to be led by a formal regional council. Local governments interested in pursuing solar initiatives—and even in exploring regional collaborations—can also use the SRII Best Management Practices (BMPs) framework for their own programs. Here are some ideas of ways that local governments can directly engage with the lessons of SRII:

1. Develop a local stakeholder group to review the SRII BMPs (see the BMP table) and identify one or two to work toward.
2. Review the solar policies or programs of neighboring communities. Find out if others in your region are already working on advancing solar technologies and meet with them to learn about their experiences or about policies that could be replicated.
3. Bring together your own regional network of practitioners, such as building code officials, energy managers, and planning departments. When possible, solar is best addressed at the regional level as it provides contractors and industry assurances of consistency across jurisdictions. Establishing a standardized permitting process and consistent zoning ordinances are just two ways to create a solar-friendly region.

Through SRII, RPCs work closely with NARC, MARC, MCG, and peer councils to create comprehensive and functional plans for solar growth and development; engage financial and industry sectors; educate member jurisdictions on the misconceptions about solar energy in their region; and assess the economic, social, and political impacts related to solar energy development. The SRII grant funding has provided the participating RPCs with an unparalleled opportunity to engage their regions’ local governments in ongoing discussions about how to prepare for and capitalize on the economic opportunities of current and future solar investments.

SRII Activities

Selection of the ten RPCs was based on a competitive application process managed by NARC. Criteria for participation were developed to ensure not only that selected councils were committed to advancing

“This regional approach creates competitive advantages for our entire area.”

**Jay C. Leipzig, AICP, Director,
Community and Economic Development Department,
City of Belton, Missouri**

“The Southwest Florida Regional Planning Council Solar Ready II project is a true collaboration of multiple stakeholders, including local governments and regulatory agencies, the private sector, higher education, citizens, [and] nongovernmental organizations within the six-county region.”

**Jennifer Pellechio, Southwest Florida
Regional Planning Council Deputy Director**

solar technologies, but also that there existed favorable conditions for them to do so. Requirements included having conducted an assessment of regional market readiness (Solar Market Maturity Model [SM3]), established partnerships with local utilities and nonprofits, and making a commitment to a financial and in-kind match of resources.

The central element of SRII is the distribution and application of solar BMPs (see table in the sidebar on SRII BMPs). Originally developed through Solar Ready KC and updated by MCG for SRII, the BMPs are fifteen actions that have been successful in facilitating installations and building solar markets across the country.⁵ The practices are divided across three categories: planning improvements, process improvements, and financing.

Planning improvements relate to zoning and other typical community development functions. Process improvements refer to how a jurisdiction provides information

SRII BEST MANAGEMENT PRACTICES (BMPS)⁵:

BMP CATEGORIES	IMPLEMENTATION STEPS	ACTION ITEMS
PLANNING IMPROVEMENTS	Zoning code improvements	Address solar in the zoning code and/or adopt a solar ordinance
	Enable solar access	Adopt a solar access ordinance Engage Homeowners Associations
	Building code improvement	Develop solar ready guidelines Adopt a Solar Ready Ordinance
PROCESS IMPROVEMENTS	Streamline permits	Develop criteria for expedited process Create a permit checklist Provide a central information source
	Standardize permit fees	Fixed fees for residential permits Calculator for commercial permits
	Pre-qualify plans and installers	Pre-qualify installers Pre-qualify electrical plans
FINANCING	Engage local lenders	Provide resources and host a workshop for lending institutions
	Enact a Solarize Campaign	Launch a Solarize Campaign Partner with local lenders

about permitting and the permitting process itself, as well as about fee amounts for installing solar. The financing BMPs encourage innovative ways to drive down the cost of solar by working with local lenders. Also contained within the BMP framework are resources to learn more and examples of communities that have successfully implemented each practice. By offering a clearinghouse of examples and information, SRII is providing the tools for local governments to develop consistent policies and streamline processes that will have lasting, positive impacts.

“Improvements in the permitting and planning process are one of the fastest and most effective means to facilitate solar installations, making the process clear and seamless, offering a centralized location for up-to-date information, standardizing permit fees, coordinating utility notification and establishing a process to pre-qualify plans and installers.”

Excerpt from *Solar Ready KC White Paper*, p. 5.

“Solar Ready is helping us break down perceived barriers and is helping to streamline the process of implementing these solutions so that everybody wins through reduced energy costs.”

Tyson Warner, Executive Director,
Northwestern Indiana Regional Planning Commission

To prioritize and select action items from the list of BMPs, each participating RPC worked with existing stakeholder groups made up of representatives from local governments, utilities, environmental organizations, and the community. These groups met quarterly to discuss outreach efforts, jurisdictional needs, and project objectives. BMPs were selected in accordance with the specific needs of the region and the feasibility of implementation (see “Appendix” for links to the BMPs selected by each RPC). And as it is often not possible for an RPC to deliver one-on-one technical assistance to each member jurisdiction, the groups also provided a peer network, serving as communication hubs to connect and communicate efforts across and among jurisdictions, ensuring that efforts truly have a regional impact.

Because, as has already been stated, participating RPCs represent ten geographically diverse regions, consisting of over 200 local jurisdictions with various needs, each council has customized an outreach approach to most effectively share information about

“Through partnerships with Greater Philadelphia’s municipalities, counties, installers, and other stakeholders, DVRPC [Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission] is promoting the adoption of regionally consistent zoning and permitting processes, and raising awareness among the region’s residents on viability of solar for their home or business. These efforts will help reduce PV’s soft (non-hardware) installation costs, and will help improve solar market conditions in Greater Philadelphia.”

Barry Seymour, Executive Director,
Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission



Photo courtesy of Mid-America Regional Council

“Training hosted by MARC and the Solar Instructor Training Network for code officials, plan reviewers, and installers.”

SRII and the benefits of solar adoption with residents across its member jurisdictions. For example, The Central New York Regional Planning and Development Board and the Tampa Bay Regional Planning Council, created the [Solarize Syracuse](#) and [Solar Ready Florida](#) websites, to share information on solar and solar installations with residents, while the North Central Texas Council of Governments and Southwest Florida Regional Planning Council produced the [North Central Texas Solar Initiative](#) video and [Solar Ready Florida](#) video to educate their community about SRII. All RPCs have held educational summits and/or technical workshops on topics ranging from expedited zoning and permitting processes to strategies for lenders and safety workshops for first responders. NARC and MCG have assisted the councils’ communications and outreach strategies by creating materials and/or templates that each council can customize to meet its needs.⁶

“A key theme heard from all of the OKI [Ohio-Kentucky-Indiana Regional Council of Governments] focus group sessions was the need to educate all sectors [about] the opportunities and benefits of rooftop solar. The interactive solar map being developed and deployed by OKI will heighten awareness of our solar resource across the region, enabling property owners to explore cost-effective solar options.”

**Daniel Young, Lead Systems Designer,
Dovetail Solar and Wind and Ohio-Kentucky-Indiana
Regional Council of Governments Solar Ready II
Stakeholder Group Member**

“There are 4,000 Floridians employed in the solar industry, and the Sunshine State has the potential to add many more jobs in this sector. Through the Solar Ready Florida project, the Tampa Bay Regional Planning Council and our local governments are working to make it easier for Tampa Bay residents and businesses to install rooftop solar PV systems. Increased adoption of solar PV promotes the growth of the solar industry within the region and leads to more jobs and more economic opportunities for the people of Tampa Bay.”

**Manny Pumariaga, Executive Director,
Tampa Bay Regional Planning Council**

Lessons Learned

As SRII shows, using the outreach capacity and technical expertise of RPCs to support local government initiatives can be greatly effective at creating regionally consistent policies that lead to favorable solar market conditions in these areas. The following strategies and recommendations are based on the experience of SRII and may be helpful for other RPCs—as well as local governments—in their efforts to advance solar technologies throughout a region:

1. Select BMPs that are priorities for the region, and work with participating jurisdictions to develop implementation plans. Preselecting BMPs, rather than asking each jurisdiction to select practices independently, ensures that the region is working cohesively toward the same goals and has the greatest chance of influencing regional market conditions.

“Through Solar Ready II, we have been able to tackle issues related to permitting, installation, [and] inspection, and we’re working with local lending institutions [to] make funding sources for solar more available for our homeowners.”

**Rick Buss, Assistant City Manager,
City of Surprise, Arizona**



Photo courtesy of North Central Texas Council of Governments

“Solar Demo at Texas Renewable Energy Industries Association Firefighter and First Responder Solar Energy System Safety Workshop, cohosted by the North Central Texas Council of Governments”

2. Identify a point of contact (e.g., an elected official, a city staff member) at each participating local government. This person should act as a champion ensuring that implementation of BMPs is moving forward.
3. Make sure the RPC is aware of all state policies and regulations that may influence or present barriers to implementation of certain BMPs.
4. Engage all the various stakeholders within a jurisdiction. RPCs can help local governments plan training or educational workshops that bring together local utilities, trade groups, academic institutions, etc., so that all stakeholders can achieve the same level of understanding of solar energy and its potential for the region. RPCs are especially encouraged to engage local financial institutions (lenders, investors, etc.) early in the process to debunk solar myths, demonstrate the financial benefits of solar, and gain their support. The solar industry should also be engaged from the beginning to provide insight into specific policy or process barriers that the stakeholders encounter.

5. Partner with existing stakeholders focused on renewable energy. Coordinating with these entities may increase access to new audiences and lend an added level of credibility to local solar initiatives.

“This project increases the awareness of the benefits of solar power; plus, it helps to promote common approaches and standards that local governments can use in the permitting process for solar installations. Long term, the results of this project will be evidenced through less demand on electricity-generating units, lower energy costs, and improved air quality.”

**Mike Eastland, Executive Director,
North Central Texas Council of Governments**

“The CNY RPDB [Central New York Regional Planning and Development Board] Solar Ready II project is advancing the region’s sustainability goals by reducing barriers and costs for solar power. Over time, the project will significantly increase the deployment of solar power in Central New York, helping to meet the region’s goal of increasing renewable energy sources tenfold by the year 2030.”

**Chris Carrick, Energy Manager, Central New York
Regional Planning and Development Board**

Contacts

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Endnotes

1. Unless otherwise noted, all information in this case study was obtained through interviews with the individuals listed under “Contacts.”
2. U.S. Department of Energy, “Rooftop Solar Challenge II” funding solicitation, http://www1.eere.energy.gov/solar/sunshot/financial_opps_detail.html?sol_id=561.
3. Mid-America Regional Council (MARC), *Solar Ready KC: Solar Installation Policy and Practice in Kansas City and Beyond* (May 2013), http://www.marc.org/Environment/Energy/pdf/Solar_Ready_White_Paper.aspx.
4. National Association of Regional Councils (NARC), “What Is a Regional Council or Council of Governments?,” <http://narc.org/about-narc/cogs-mpos/>.
5. BMPs developed for SR II can be found at <http://narc.org/solarready/bmps/> and http://narc.org/wp-content/uploads/BMP-SRII-Overview_052114.pdf
6. A complete list of the BMPs selected by each RPC and the activities of each can be found at NARC, “Solar Ready Regions,” <http://narc.org/solarready/>.
7. Populations based on 2010-2013 ACS Population Estimates as of November 2014

Appendix

Best Management Practice Activities of Regional Planning Councils Involved in Solar Ready II (SR II)

Detailed information on activities for each regional planning council involved in SR II can be found at:

Central New York Regional Planning and Development Board
<http://narc.org/solarready/cnyrpdb/>

Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission
<http://narc.org/solarready/dvrpc/>

Maricopa Association of Governments
<http://narc.org/solarready/mag/>

Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments
<http://narc.org/solarready/mwco/>

Mid-America Regional Council
<http://narc.org/solarready/marc/>

North Central Texas Council of Governments
<http://narc.org/solarready/nctcog/>

Northwestern Indiana Regional Planning Commission
<http://narc.org/solarready/nirpc/>

Ohio-Kentucky-Indiana Regional Council of Governments
<http://narc.org/solarready/oki/>

Southwest Florida Regional Planning Council
<http://narc.org/solarready/swfrpc/>

Tampa Bay Regional Planning Council
<http://narc.org/solarready/tbrpc/>

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