



The Honorable Kelly Speakes-Backman takes a tour of Jack's Solar Garden with Derek Passarelli and Martin Keller, guided by Byron Kominek.  
*Photo by Joe DelNero, NREL 70378.*

# Case Study: Increasing Solar Participation Among LIHEAP and WAP Clients in DC

## Pathways: Use of LIHEAP and WAP Infrastructure for External Solar Program Intake.

## Rooftop and Community Solar for LIHEAP and WAP Clients Through DC Solar for All

The DC Department of Energy and Environment (DOEE) manages Solar for All with an annual budget of \$10–\$20 million and works with partner organizations to install solar photovoltaics on single-family homes and develop community solar projects benefiting eligible DC households, including multifamily and single-family renters.<sup>1</sup> The program aims to reduce the electric bills of 100,000 low-income households by at least 50% by 2032.<sup>2</sup> To be eligible, households must have a household income at or below 80% of the Area Median Income or be enrolled in an income-verified program such

as Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP), Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), or other utility assistance programs.

DOEE initially experienced slower-than-expected uptake of Solar for All, which was attributed to general lack of program awareness and varying funding availability for solar.<sup>3</sup> Emerging from the pandemic, DOEE LIHEAP staff found that in-person intake centers were one of the most effective at communicating the benefits of Solar for All and generating enrollments.<sup>4</sup> DOEE also manages both Weatherization Assistance Program (WAP) and LIHEAP and allows WAP- and LIHEAP-eligible applicants to be easily enrolled in Solar for All, helping DOEE exceed its goal of 2,000 program enrollees in 2023.<sup>5</sup> DOEE sends all LIHEAP clients a mailer for Solar for All and enrolls them in the program once they fill out and return the required paperwork.<sup>6</sup> As of 2024, DC Solar For All enrolled 10,000 participants, an estimated 70% of which came from a LIHEAP referral.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>1</sup> DC DOEE—2022 survey response.

<sup>2</sup> <https://doee.dc.gov/solarforall>.

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.energy.gov/communitysolar/district-columbia-solar-all-sunny-awards-winner>.

<sup>4</sup> [https://doee.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/ddoe/service\\_content/attachments/Revised%20DOEE%20Utility%20Assistance%20Application%20Final%20V25\\_fillable%20%281%29.pdf](https://doee.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/ddoe/service_content/attachments/Revised%20DOEE%20Utility%20Assistance%20Application%20Final%20V25_fillable%20%281%29.pdf).

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.dcseu.com/solar-for-all>.

<sup>6</sup> DC DOEE—February 1, 2023 interview.

<sup>7</sup> DC DOEE—February 1, 2023 interview.



## Inclusive Shared Solar Initiative to Improve Low-Income Solar Access

In 2021, DOE joined the Inclusive Shared Solar Initiative, a multistate partnership led by the National Association of State Energy Officials and the National Energy Assistance Directors Association to increase accessibility of community solar for low-income households. DOE's Inclusive Shared Solar Initiative Implementation Plan focuses on three strategies to expand and improve Solar for All. Through the first strategy to "Advance Community Solar in DC Community Resilience Hub Program," DC plans to build a Community Resilience Center with community solar and storage in a neighborhood identified by a need for resiliency services and higher population of low-income residents. DOE has selected the Fauntery Community Enrichment Center as its partner to implement the Resilience Center, located in Ward 7 in DC, a historically disadvantaged community. The second strategy, "Reduce Barriers to Entry for LMI Subscribers," aims to improve coordination between LIHEAP and other District energy and utility assistance programs, and explore the possibility for using tax records to provide income verification for Solar for All.<sup>8</sup> The third strategy, "Addressing Barriers for Master-Metered Multifamily Housing Residents," expands on DOE's waiver from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) preventing Solar for All benefits from causing rental increases or utility allowance adjustments for residents that receive HUD benefits or live in HUD housing.

## Future Solar Access Expansion

DC is a pilot participant of the Low-Income Clean Energy Connector, an initiative of the National Community Solar Partnership and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. The Connector streamlines the process for LIHEAP implementers to connect clients with community solar subscriptions that have verified savings and strong consumer protections.<sup>9</sup>

## Key Takeaways

- Streamlined applications and inter-program coordination can reduce the administrative burden for income verification and enrollment of low-income participants in solar.
- DOE prioritized coordination with existing low-income solar programs rather than developing a new solar program within LIHEAP due to staff capacity and timing.<sup>10</sup> Partnering with external solar programs was viewed as a simpler way to connect program recipients with solar.
- In-person intake centers were successful for overcoming client concerns or misconceptions about participating in community solar via Solar for All.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>8</sup> [https://www.naseo.org/data/sites/1/documents/publications/DC%20Implementation%20Plan\\_FINAL\\_7-11.pdf](https://www.naseo.org/data/sites/1/documents/publications/DC%20Implementation%20Plan_FINAL_7-11.pdf).

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.energy.gov/communitysolar/low-income-clean-energy-connector>.

<sup>10</sup> DC DOE-2022 survey response.

<sup>11</sup> DC DOE-February 1, 2023 interview.