



Monitoring, Evaluating, and Updating Your Community Solar Action Plan

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and Alison Bates²

1 UMass Clean Energy Extension

2 Colby College

NREL Technical Monitor: Sara Farrar

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Office of Energy Efficiency & Renewable Energy
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Monitoring, Evaluating, and Updating Your *Community Solar Action Plan*



6. Keep It Current

This fact sheet is part of the *Community Planning for Solar* toolkit designed to help Massachusetts municipalities and others proactively plan for solar development in their communities. For more information, please visit: <https://ag.umass.edu/solarplanning>

Note: This fact sheet is adapted from information in (1) National Institute of Standards and Technology Special Publication 1190-1, (May 2016), <https://nvlpubs.nist.gov/nistpubs/SpecialPublications/NIST.SP.1190v1.pdf> and (2) Local Mitigation Planning Handbook, FEMA (2013), <https://www.fema.gov/sites/default/files/2020-06/fema-local-mitigation-planning-handbook-03-2013.pdf>.

Keeping Your *Community Solar Action Plan* Current

The *Community Solar Action Plan* is a living document that guides community solar planning action over time. As conditions change, new information becomes available, or actions progress over the life of the plan, adjustments may be necessary to maintain the plan's relevance. This fact sheet describes some things to consider when implementing, monitoring, evaluating, and updating the *Community Solar Action Plan* over time.



Implementing the Plan

Once the *Community Solar Action Plan* is approved through the community's approval process, the planning process is complete (for now) and the "heavy lifting" shifts from the Solar Planning Team to the municipal boards, committees and departments, and (in some cases) private sector organizations that are responsible for the plan's implementation. The approved *Community Solar Action Plan* will ideally be incorporated into these organizations' priorities and related policies, plans, and programs. To maintain momentum and continuity, and to assure that the plan receives the persistent attention that it will need, we recommend identifying a committee, board, or municipal employee responsible for tracking, coordinating, and communicating solar planning related efforts.

Photo credit: Community Planning Session, Michigan Municipal League, marked with CC BY-NC-ND 2.0

Monitoring, Evaluating, and Updating the Plan

Ideally, the *Community Planning for Solar* planning team will recommend a process for monitoring, evaluating, and updating the *Community Solar Action Plan* on a recurring (e.g., 5-year cycle) basis. The plan – including the implementation strategy – may need to be modified depending on changes such as the social or physical characteristics of the community, new construction, zoning changes, funding sources, or improved understanding of the built environment. Plan revisions may also be triggered by the availability of new solar technologies; changes to the local, state, and federal clean energy policy landscape; and/or lessons learned during implementation of the plan.

Monitoring

Plan monitoring means tracking the implementation of the plan over time. The plan must identify how, when, and by whom the plan will be monitored. For example, the plan may describe a monitoring system for tracking the status of the actions and reporting this information on a quarterly basis. Monitoring the plan is important to (1) help the community to keep its focus on, and support for, implementing the plan (including the many stakeholders who participate in or benefit from its implementation), and (2) ensure that the plan is adjusted for new information, insights, and circumstances.

Evaluating

Plan evaluation entails assessing the effectiveness of the plan at achieving its stated purpose and goals. The Solar Planning Team must identify how, when, and by whom the plan will be evaluated. The Solar Planning Team may develop a list of metrics to evaluate progress toward goals on an annual basis. For instance, if a goal is to improve public awareness of the risks and benefits of solar development, then conducting a repeat of the community survey that was first conducted during the planning process may be warranted on a periodic basis.

Updating

It is important that community stakeholders have regular opportunities to evaluate the *Community Solar Action Plan*, and that mechanisms for updating or adjusting it are in place and documented. Updates may include modifying the overall planning goals, stakeholder groups, or short or long-term implementation strategies. This work can be led by the designated lead official or by successors charged with implementing and maintaining the plan.

Further Reading

Additional resources related to best practices for maintaining municipal solar plans:

- *FEMA Local Mitigation Planning Handbook (2013)*¹
- *Community Resilience Planning Guide for Buildings and Infrastructure Systems (2016)*²

While these resources address local mitigation and resilience planning, many of the principles and processes for maintaining municipal plans are relevant to community solar planning.

¹ https://www.fema.gov/sites/default/files/2020-06/fema-local-mitigation-planning-handbook_03-2013.pdf

² <https://nvlpubs.nist.gov/nistpubs/SpecialPublications/NIST.SP.1190v1.pdf>