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Inyo County Receives “SolSmart Bronze” Award for Advancing Small-scale Solar Energy Growth

[SolSmart](#), a program funded by the [U.S. Department of Energy SunShot Initiative](#), has recognized Inyo County as second in the nation for taking important first steps to encourage solar energy for homes and businesses. As a SolSmart Bronze designee, Inyo County is receiving national recognition for adopting programs and practices that make it faster, easier, and cheaper for homes and businesses to go solar.

Inyo County has been a leader in renewable energy planning in California. Inyo County’s award-winning Renewable Energy General Plan Amendment (REGPA) identifies Solar Energy Development Areas (SEDA) where large-scale solar energy facilities may be considered for siting, based on site-specific studies and environmental review. The County prepared an Environmental Impact Report to evaluate the overall environmental consequences of the REGPA. Public process was key in developing a Plan that had public support. The Plan encourages small-scale solar energy facilities.

To achieve designation, Inyo County took steps to reduce solar “soft costs,” which are non-hardware costs that can increase the time and money it takes to install a solar energy system. Examples of soft costs include planning and zoning; permitting; financing; customer acquisition; and installation labor. Soft costs now represent roughly two-thirds of the total price of an installed residential system. Reducing these costs leads to savings that are passed on to consumers.

Through the Department of Energy’s Sun Shot – Roadmap Inyo County deployed a program to encourage small solar energy systems and energy efficiency for local residents and businesses. The County developed an expedited permitting process for small-scale solar energy systems and institutes a small-scale solar-friendly zoning ordinance. In cooperation with Southern California Edison (SCE), the County updated its General Plan to incorporate energy efficiency goals, policies, and implementation measures. Also in cooperation with SCE, the County has prepared an Energy Efficiency Revolving Loan Fund program, and is seeking seed funds to implement. For more information about the County’s renewable energy program, visit <http://inyoplanning.org/ERRE.htm>.

Looking towards the future, the County hopes to further encourage building a network of local contractors to develop small-scale solar and energy efficiency projects. The County also is strategizing to work with the City of Los Angeles Department of Water and Power to better incentivize small-scale solar and energy efficiency in the Owens Valley. In addition to following up on its work on the Sun Shot Initiative and the SolSmart program, the County also is beginning to analyze Community Choice Aggregation opportunities, which would encourage local community renewable energy generation and procurement.

The SolSmart designation team, led by the International City/County Management Association, evaluates communities and awards them points based on the actions they take to reduce soft costs and other barriers to going solar. Communities that take sufficient action are designed either gold, silver, or bronze. As a bronze designee, Inyo County will now have the opportunity earn additional points to qualify as silver or gold.

As part of the SolSmart program, all participating communities are eligible to request no-cost technical assistance from a team of national solar experts to help them achieve designation. The SolSmart technical assistance team is led by [The Solar Foundation](#).

Launched in April 2016, SolSmart aims to designate 300 communities during the three-year, federally funded program.

About SolSmart

SolSmart is a national designation and technical assistance program that recognizes leading solar communities and empowers additional communities to expand their local solar markets. Funded by the U.S. Department of Energy SunShot Initiative, SolSmart strives to cut red tape, drive greater solar deployment, and make it possible for even more American homes and businesses to access solar energy to meet their electricity needs. Learn more at SolSmart.org.

About the SunShot Initiative

The U.S. Department of Energy SunShot Initiative is a collaborative national effort that aggressively drives innovation to make solar energy fully cost-competitive with traditional energy sources before the end of the decade. Through SunShot, the Energy Department supports efforts by private companies, universities, and national laboratories to drive down the cost of solar electricity to \$0.06 per kilowatt-hour. Learn more at energy.gov/sunshot.