

Ohioans Have a New Way to Go Solar

A packed room of nearly 100 came together in Lorain County to learn how they could put solar on their homes. They were brought together by OH SUN, a new group that has started to help Ohioans go solar.

OH SUN expands access to solar threefold: by educating Ohioans about the benefits of distributed solar energy; helping them organize group solar installations; and strengthening the state's policies and its community of solar supporters. The group is a project of Community Power Network, (CPN) a national network of advocates for local renewable energy.

"It is critical that the solar industry is not just adding customers, but building a base of supporters," Anya Schoolman, CPN Executive Director, said. "We empower solar homeowners to take an active part in solar before, during, and after their system is installed."

OH SUN is helping Lorain County residents form the state's first solar co-op. CPN has pioneered the use of solar co-ops to help homeowners go solar. It works with homeowners through its state SUN programs in Washington, D.C., Maryland, Virginia, West Virginia, and now Ohio to educate them about solar. Together, the organization has helped to start more than 50 co-ops and to encourage more than 1,000 homeowners to go solar.

OH SUN works with local partners to recruit and educate co-op members about solar. In Lorain County, it is working with the Oberlin Peoples Energy Cooperative. Once new members join the group, OH SUN will review their roof to ensure that it is right for solar. OH SUN then works with members so they understand all aspects of the installation process, from solar technology to solar financing.

Once the group is large enough (approximately 30 members) OH SUN will release an RFP on behalf of the group. Local solar installers then bid and co-op members will select a company to complete all of the installations.

At this point, co-op members have the option to purchase panels individually based on the pricing in the winning installer's bid. By going solar as a group and choosing a single installer, each participant generally saves up to 20% off the cost of their system.

The co-ops are able to achieve these savings because of the group's



Ohio SUN's first Solar Co-op Meeting in Ohio at Oberlin in Lorain County on Feb. 3, 2016

bulk buying power. Going solar as a group helps installers cut costs in several ways. The pool of customers allows the installer to purchase panels and other material in bulk, hence lowering costs. The co-op also helps lower the "soft costs" of solar, meaning the cost of non-hardware elements of the installation. By working with a group in a proscribed area means installers may only have to make one trip to the permitting office. It also makes it easier for the installation company to schedule crews to install panels on customers' homes. Finally, customer acquisition is a significant percentage of any installer's budget. The co-op lowers this cost by providing the selected installer with an educated and ready pool of solar customers.

"Ohioans are eager to go solar to save money, take control of their electricity production, and create good local jobs," Luke Sulfridge, OH SUN Program Director, said. "The co-ops facilitate this process by connecting solar installers with educated, eager solar customers."

In addition to its first group in Lorain County, OH SUN is actively working to launch co-ops in other parts of Ohio. If you are interested to help start a group in your area please contact solarteam@ohsun.org.

Lorain County residents interested in joining the co-op can sign up at www.ohsun.org/lorain.

– Luke Sulfridge, OH SUN Program Director

