

*Solar is a powerful tool to drive the shift to a more just and equitable energy system.*

# Solar United Neighbors Energy Equity and Inclusion Case Statement

## Introduction

### The current opportunity

We're in the middle of a global energy crisis as communities grapple to address climate change by shifting to renewables. In the coming decades, billions of dollars will be spent to create a new energy system. This transition is already underway: it is expected 96.6 percent of net new generation capacity additions in 2020 (~74 GW) will come from wind and solar.

Thus, the question we're currently facing isn't whether or not a transition to renewables is coming. The real question is: "How can we avoid recreating the existing inequities in our energy system, but powered by renewables instead of fossil fuels?"

We need to ensure that our new energy system not only solves for climate change, but also addresses issues of equity and social justice, like access, affordability, housing stock, credit, and education. In other words, we need to acknowledge the systemic racism and injustice inherent in our current energy system and design a new system that overcomes these hurdles. The burdens of the current system are real: on average, low-income households spend

**We need to ensure that we're building a new energy system that not only solves for climate change, but also addresses the systemic racism and injustice inherent in our current energy system.**

<sup>1</sup> <https://www2.deloitte.com/us/en/pages/energy-and-resources/articles/renewable-energy-outlook.html>

7.2% of their income on utilities, while higher-income households spend only 2.3% (ACEEE, 2016). To reverse centuries of disinvestment in low-income communities and communities of color, we need to actively catalyze a better system.

In order to address systemic racism, we need to make our nation's energy system more accountable to its users – the American people. The current configuration of regional transmission organizations and highly concentrated mega-monopoly utility companies has diminished the overall equity and democratic accountability of our energy system. Utilities have evolved from their origins as locally accountable and closely regulated entities into colossal, vertically integrated, investor-owned holding companies with “captive” regulators.

Consequently, utilities' fundamental incentives have shifted: Instead of locally accountable monopoly franchises designed and regulated to socialize community costs and risks, modern utilities have become vast and complex mechanisms used to extract billions in wealth from ratepayers and local communities. The utilities then transfer that local wealth to their investors and Wall Street.

This profound transformation in the structure of our energy system has made utilities worse for everyone. It also has exacerbated the underlying racism and inequities in American society. Fortunately, one solution to both of these problems is deceptively simple—solar!

Solar is a powerful tool to drive the shift to a more just and equitable energy system. In our work over the past decade, we have seen how distributed rooftop solar gives local communities a real voice in shaping the future of our energy system. We're clear-eyed that this difficult work will require long-term investment, but our experience has shown that it is possible. And we have a plan to get there.

### Why I do this work

One of my earliest memories of living in Puerto Rico revolves around energy. Living on the island meant frequent, and sometimes very long, power outages. We lost power for two main reasons: My parents could not afford to pay the electric bill, and hurricanes and other natural disasters regularly disrupted the power grid. I still remember the first time a hurricane left us in the dark. Hurricane Hugo was a major storm, and we had no power or water for almost a month. As a kid, I simply adapted to it without understanding that regularly losing power for weeks at a time was not a universal experience. Growing up with energy insecurities left an impact on me – one that would ultimately guide my career working with under-resourced communities.



*Yesenia Rivera, Director of Energy Equity and Inclusion at Solar United Neighbors*

As a housing counselor during the Great Recession, I worked with many clients facing foreclosure. Right away I noticed a pattern: Not only did my clients struggle to pay their mortgages, they were also burdened with extremely high electric bills. Client after client sat at my desk with overdue electric bills averaging \$500-\$600 a month. Even if they were able to obtain mortgage relief, many still faced utility shutoffs that effectively deprived them of their homes.

When researching options for my clients, I came across many solar energy programs. Unfortunately, most of these programs were of no use to my clients because of credit score and income requirements.

When Solar United Neighbors was selected as a Solar for All grantee, I was finally able to work on a program that helps under-resourced communities go solar regardless of credit scores or income levels. As Solar United Neighbors' D.C. Program Director, I helped 73 families go solar at no cost to them, saving each family an average of 50% off their monthly electric bills. Not only were these families able to reduce their energy bills, but they also are building wealth through income provided by their solar energy systems' “green” credits (known as solar renewable energy credits, or SRECs). This income stream will translate into families earning approximately \$23,000 over the next 15 years – a critical source of revenue that can help break the cycle of poverty.

Our chosen project model expressly uses solar to build the value of a homeowner's primary asset—their home. Having developed and deployed a program that utilizes solar to provide real and lasting benefits to low- and moderate-income families, I've reaffirmed that a major need exists for this type of programming across the country.

## Why SUN does this work

Equity is woven into the fabric of Solar United Neighbors: It's why we chose to focus on solar, and it is part of everything we do. SUN started in 2007 as a neighborhood group of economically and racially diverse activists in Washington, D.C. The District was experiencing a period of rapid gentrification, and the nation was suffering from a sobering breakdown in the banking system.

We needed to find a way to help people pay their electric bills and stay in their homes. Rooftop solar presented itself as an immediate real-world solution. It let us invest locally, create good jobs in our community, and bring control of the energy system within our reach. From the beginning, we based our work on the fundamental premise that solar should be affordable and accessible to all. Today, after more than a decade of systematic organizing in D.C., we are proud to say the District is on a trajectory to reach that goal.

This success didn't happen by accident. We strategically built power across the District through grassroots organizing in each of D.C.'s eight wards. We helped each ward develop a local solar co-op with its own priorities, from taking a neighborhood church solar and pushing the local school board to adopt solar, to advocating for solar equity policies and challenging the utility on rate hikes. We came together annually for a District-wide Solar Congress to build a common agenda for reform. After passing two major bills in 2009 and 2011 that laid the groundwork for a D.C. solar marketplace, we then focused on expanding that market so everyone in D.C. could benefit from solar.

In order to expand solar access, we spent over a year organizing a series of meetings with community leaders, companies, and organizations involved in low-income housing. We worked with these stakeholders to identify what would be needed for them to deploy solar in such a way that its benefits could be shared among their members, tenants, and neighbors. The culmination of this outreach was a national conference co-sponsored with George Washington University that brought together low-income solar experts and community leaders from across the country. The key results of this project were a set of recommendations delivered to the city and the development of a consensus to pass the Community Renewables Energy Act of 2013. This legislation is the country's only community solar bill that both provides full net-metering credit to community solar subscribers and establishes an unlimited program free from utility control on the project pipeline.



*SUN started in Washington, D.C., in 2007 as a neighborhood group of economically and racially diverse activists seeking a solution to help people pay their electric bills and stay in their homes.*



*Our approach is to convene community members, gain a deep understanding of local barriers to solar, and organize to build political power and break down those barriers. Much of our work begins in living rooms and at community gatherings.*



*Our low-income convening brought together experts and community leaders from across the country around a shared vision for how the District could advance LMI solar.*

Importantly, this community solar law allows renters and apartment dwellers to participate in the emerging solar energy market by collectively building solar installations or buying shares in installations placed throughout the city. This is a critical step on the path to making solar affordable and accessible to every D.C. resident, including renters and residents of multi-family apartment buildings.

In 2016 we helped to increase D.C.'s Renewable Portfolio Standard and added a provision now known as Solar for All. This program directs utility compliance fines to finance solar for every single low-income household in D.C. The District is now in the process of implementing this ambitious and nationally renowned program, the results of which will reduce the collective energy burden of D.C.'s low-income households by 50%.

Our work in D.C. demonstrated a proof of concept that distributed solar energy deployment, in conjunction with strategic grassroots organizing, can make our energy system not only cleaner and more resilient, but also more just and equitable. From our early days as grassroots community organizers in the District, we have grown into a national nonprofit organization with a dozen on-the-ground field programs in D.C., Maryland, Virginia, Florida, Pennsylvania, West Virginia, Ohio, Indiana, Minnesota, Texas, Colorado, and Arizona. But we've never lost sight of our central mission to empower local communities to fashion a new vision for a just, equitable, and clean energy system with rooftop solar at the cornerstone.

## Vision

Transforming our energy system into one that empowers local communities and addresses environmental and racial injustice is a tall order. There are myriad ways to tackle the problem, and we can't take it all on.

We focus on using rooftop solar, community solar, and policy advocacy for local renewable energy programs and jobs as tools to leverage a just and equitable transition to clean energy. Done right, distributed solar can be a powerful tool to drive this shift. Investing in local, distributed solar energy allows communities to reduce the harmful burdens of our fossil fuel-based economy,

**Our vision is to leverage rooftop solar to rapidly drive a just and equitable clean energy transition.**

which communities of color disproportionately shoulder. It also creates local wealth and jobs, giving people ownership, control, and a real voice in their energy system.

Well planned and implemented distributed low- and middle-income (LMI) solar programs help communities begin to heal from the injustices of decades of environmental racism. Furthermore, when executed as part of a larger strategic organizing strategy, distributed solar challenges the existing utility model and creates opportunities for profound structural transformation of our energy system.

We have no illusions that rooftop solar is the end-all, be-all solution to environmental injustice. Nor will it become the dominant global source of clean energy. But it will drive change. Our experiences working with communities across the country have demonstrated that demanding utility accountability and deploying distributed solar in under-resourced communities and communities of color can catalyze a shift toward a new, equitable, distributed clean energy system. With demonstrated successes in urban and rural areas, we're now focused on scaling up this work across the nation. We know this is difficult work that requires long-term investment, but our experience shows that it is possible, scalable, and transformational. The time to act is now!

## Strategy

Ensuring that under-resourced communities play a role in designing a new energy system is our central strategy. Local communities should feel empowered to identify and articulate what they need and want. Our role, then, is to engage and support local advocates to help put their plans into action.

In practice, we are often approached by communities that have identified distributed solar as a key intervention they want to implement. We then work with them to develop programs that deploy local distributed solar and help overcome the barriers to solar adoption that they face.

Those barriers could be varied – lack of capital, unfair laws, lack of technical knowledge around solar technology, lack of utility transparency or accountability, and other reasons. Thus, we deploy a variety of tactics to address these barriers, from educational programs that help community members learn about clean energy and acquire solar panels, to organizing constituents to fight inequitable legislation that prevents everyone from realizing the benefits of clean energy.

Throughout this work, we hold fast to the conviction that distributed solar can rapidly drive a just and equitable clean energy transition. We develop real solar projects – getting panels on roofs – and create real policy change. Every community group, church, school, business, and individual we work with becomes part of our network. We elevate their voices to set policy priorities, support and leverage local campaigns, and build broad coalitions to fight for change. These interventions build momentum and power to realize a rapid transition to a cleaner, more just energy system.

## Creating policy change

Based on our grassroots work in local communities, we've identified a number of federal and state policy barriers that prevent communities from reaping the benefits of distributed solar.

Distributed solar does more than address climate change. It:

- » Reduces pollution that disproportionately burdens LMI communities
- » Catalyzes local wealth and job creation
- » Empowers communities to take charge of their energy system
- » Is an immediate, scalable intervention that challenges the dominant monopoly utility business model

**We are not giving people a one-time assistance; we are helping them create a long-term solution to their energy burden.**

## Federal Campaigns

Advocacy at the federal level must address large-scale renewable energy and equity shortcomings. The Covid-19 pandemic has highlighted the flaws in our dependency on globalized, fossil fuel-based energy markets and the inequitable energy and pollution burdens faced by too many vulnerable communities. We believe that the federal government has an opportunity and an obligation to step forward with a strong national commitment on equitable clean energy policies.

The following suggestions are far from comprehensive, but paint a picture of the breadth of solutions that could be successfully deployed with strong national advocacy campaigns and broad public support:

- » A comprehensive federal stimulus bill that focuses on expanding access to renewable energy, while creating green jobs, could hold widespread appeal in the current economic climate. A program designed to jumpstart our ailing economy by bringing solar to 30 million roofs would have a profound effect on the rate of solar adoption.
- » Another important pathway forward is reform of existing energy assistance programs to facilitate distributed solar deployment. In 2019, the federal government spent \$3.65 billion on direct energy assistance block grants to states, many of which don't allow funds to be used on solar installations. By addressing the federal barriers that hinder local and state governments from using these funds to deploy affordable rooftop solar in local communities, major steps could be taken toward widespread deployment of distributed renewable energy technology and a more equitable, impactful, and sustainable use of energy assistance. This would have to take place without threatening, limiting, or undermining current energy assistance programs.
  - For example, the U.S. Department of Energy has partnered with the State of Colorado to implement a successful pilot program in which federal Weatherization Assistance Program (WAP) funds are deployed to install solar systems on the homes of LMI Colorado residents. This innovative program allows the state of Colorado to use its WAP funding in an efficient and cost-effective manner, saving the state money in the long run. Unfortunately, instead of implementing such programs nationwide, the Department of Energy currently requires states to apply to participate on a case-by-case basis, thus dramatically slowing the speed at which states can access federal WAP funds for local solar deployment.
- » Building true equity in the energy system requires venturing beyond urban areas. Over the past few years and culminating with the 2018 reauthorization of the U.S. farm bill, we have worked to ensure that the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Rural Energy for America Program (REAP) continues to be fully funded and effectively deployed. REAP is a crucial program that allows American farmers and rural small business owners to access federal grant funding and guaranteed loan financing for renewable energy and energy efficiency



**Solar = Energy Freedom**  
**SaveOurSolar2020.org**

<sup>2</sup> <https://liheapch.acf.hhs.gov/Funding/funding.htm#:~:text=The%20legislation%20provides%20for%20a%20total%20funding%20amount%20of%20%243.39,allocations%20and%20tribal%20grantee%20allocations.&text=The%20Weatherization%20Assistance%20Program%20is,for%20training%20and%20technical%20assistance.>

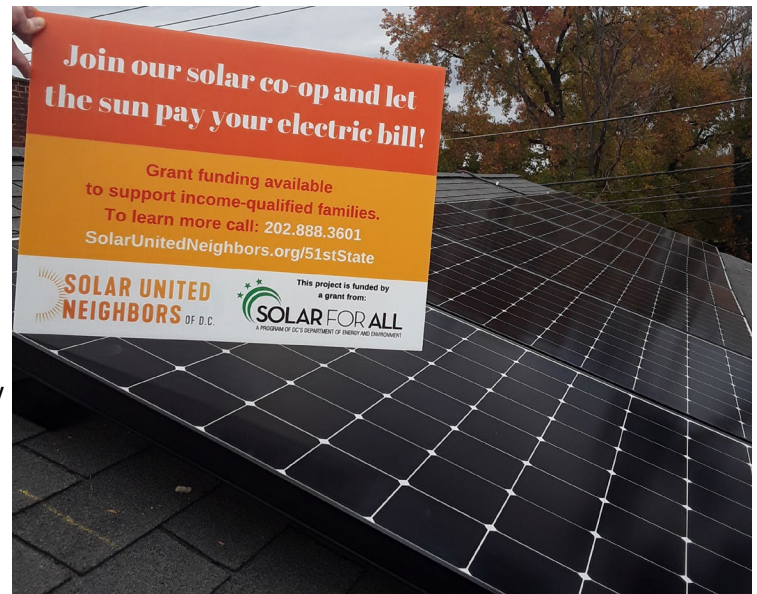
projects, including on-site solar. Over time, investing in distributed solar technology helps our nation's small business owners and agricultural producers lower their energy costs and maintain profitability.

Other potential federal work includes: extending and revising the solar investment tax credit to include a rebate program for churches, non-profits, LMI households, and municipalities; defending fundamental solar rights by standing up to shady utility front groups' attempts to limit local control over energy policy; engaging with and cultivating the growing federal solar legislative caucus; and providing insights, comments, and support for people and groups seeking to connect with energy democracy-focused advocacy efforts.

## State Level Policy and Education

Most U.S. energy policy is created and implemented on the state and local levels. This generates copious opportunities and needs to advocate for state and local policies that promote an equitable transition to clean energy. Specific state-level advocacy and outreach opportunities include:

**Passing community solar legislation:** Community solar programs allow residents of multi-family buildings, renters, and others who do not own a home to access the benefits of distributed solar energy. By purchasing or subscribing to a "share" in a solar project in their community, individuals can benefit from solar without the necessity of installing it on their own roof. Even after a state passes community solar legislation, the fight does not end there. Ongoing work is necessary to ensure that LMI communities can access local community solar projects through low-income program carveouts and innovative project design and financing. Close watchdogging is also necessary to ensure that utility-run programs don't co-opt the concept of community solar as a means to justify rate hikes or implement programs that don't provide real benefits to local communities, including LMI households and communities of color.



**Fighting for dedicated funding for low-income programs in city and state budgets:** Cities and states can fund a variety of program models to deploy solar in low-income communities, whether through public benefits charges, fees from the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative (RGGI), Renewable Portfolio Standards, or other mechanisms. We support and leverage dedicated local advocates to help ensure that available funding gets channeled to support solar adoption in low-income communities and communities of color.

**Engaging in rulemaking around utility shut-offs, rate design, and utility accountability:** Much energy policymaking occurs in the hearing rooms of a state's public service commission. Engaging on these issues requires deep and sustained local organizing to ensure that community members can meaningfully participate in decision-making processes. We provide resources, expertise, toolboxes, trainings, and technical assistance to elevate and amplify the voices of local advocates and campaign organizers during utility rate cases and other significant regulatory proceedings.

**Utilizing solar program design to facilitate connections on key issues:** We have had great success using community input on LMI solar program design to facilitate connections between groups and individuals focused on a variety of issues in their communities, such as housing, tenants' rights, police reform, and local economic development. By creating opportunities for stakeholder groups to learn from each other and to advocate for their rights and values in hearings at public service commissions, state legislatures, and city councils, we help strengthen the overall movement for racial justice and bring new, diverse voices into the work of energy democracy.

**Deploying grassroots training and education:** Grassroots training and public education on solar are critical in order to give partners and local communities the technical expertise needed to implement their visions for renewables in their communities. We provide training and education on topics ranging from solar technology basics, storage and electric vehicles, to teaching communities how to effectively engage with regulatory bodies and build power.

**Setting ambitious state Renewable Portfolio Standards with mandatory distributed solar carve-outs and funding for LMI programs:** These policies have significant potential to move the needle on LMI solar adoption by establishing long-term programs that facilitate widespread deployment of distributed solar energy.

## Our Unique Niche

Again and again, we find that helping communities deploy solar leads to transformation of local energy systems. Informing all our work, our overarching theory of change is to help communities “go solar, join together, and fight for your energy rights.” We start with implementing on-the-ground projects – the policy and advocacy work naturally follows.

We work with state and local partners to implement pilot and model programs to test approaches to developing, scaling, and sustaining LMI solar adoption. From experience, we have learned it is best to start with real, tangible projects that provide a proof of concept. In the process of implementing such projects, we learn about the community’s unique local solar market, cultivate an engaged grassroots constituency, and garner the political support necessary to scale the program.

This tactic of project deployment as an organizing tool in turn builds an influential constituency to fight for their energy rights. The cycle, thus, is mutually reinforcing. Over time, we are able to scale up support and funding for comprehensive LMI solar programs that provide significant benefits to local communities. A prime example is the Solar for All program in Washington, D.C., which will use solar to reduce the energy bills of over 100,000 low-income families in the District by 2032.

We support communities in doing the heavy lifting of identifying their highest-priority needs. If those needs include building a more democratic energy system, then we help them to operationalize specific solutions that make sense for their community. Solar technology and policy are complex, and Solar United Neighbors occupies a unique position to be able to share our experience and deep technical expertise in this arena. We focus heavily on working with local community partners and transferring that expertise to local stakeholders in order to build long-term capacity to create and sustain change. We are not offering one-time assistance; we are helping to create long-term solutions to complex problems. Our ultimate goal remains to help communities quickly and efficiently navigate the transition to a more just, equitable, and clean energy system.

## Successes in expanding energy equity

In addition to our successes in Washington, D.C., we have been deeply involved in organizing for equity in a variety of communities across the country. From supporting a just economic transition in Appalachian coal country, to holding utilities accountable to their ratepayers, to fighting for fair elections in rural electric cooperatives, to opposing unfair utility mergers and cost shifts, we fight for local control, energy democracy, utility accountability, and equity in our energy system. Collectively, these fights are shifting the conversation around energy in the United States and help lay the groundwork for a more just, clean, equitable energy system.





## Just Transition for Appalachia

Solar United Neighbors co-founded the West Virginians for Energy Freedom coalition in 2017 to fight a major utility company's proposed transfer of ownership of an unprofitable coal-fired power plant from a deregulated Ohio-based subsidiary onto its regulated subsidiaries in West Virginia. Had this scheme been successful, the utility's West Virginia ratepayers would have assumed all of the plant's costs and financial risk while the company's shareholders enjoyed a generous guaranteed rate of return on this bad investment.

West Virginians for Energy Freedom led a successful year-long campaign to fight this utility's scheme to squeeze profits from vulnerable West Virginia ratepayers. Our advocacy forced the West Virginia Public Service Commission (PSC) to hold a series of three public hearings in areas of the state where residents would be directly impacted by the plant transfer. Each hearing was packed with attendees, and the vast majority spoke in opposition to the deal. Sustained media coverage kept the issue in the spotlight in West Virginia's major newspapers and TV and radio news outlets. Coalition members, including local residents, business owners, elected officials, and nonprofit leaders, flooded the PSC with 2,500 letters of protest and petition response. Ultimately, the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission denied FirstEnergy's transfer request, and in 2019 the utility announced it would sell or deactivate the plant.

The West Virginians for Energy Freedom brand and message has proven an impactful, evergreen tool to influence lawmakers and public opinion on issues of energy choice, community resilience, and local decision-making. In 2019, the coalition pivoted to focus on an advocacy campaign to legalize third-party solar Power Purchase Agreements (PPAs) in West Virginia. This common and powerful financing mechanism increases equitable access to affordable solar energy, especially for schools, churches, governments, and nonprofit entities that serve poor and vulnerable members of society.

The West Virginians for Energy Freedom coalition now stands at more than 40 members, from local businesses to civic groups and municipalities. Its work has led to the introduction of bipartisan bills to legalize PPAs during the 2019 and 2020 state legislative sessions. The campaign is ongoing, with growing support among leading state lawmakers and the public. The coalition is optimistic that a PPA bill will pass the West Virginia Legislature in 2021.

## Washington, D.C. 100% Cities Initiative

In 2017, the Solutions Project, Race Forward, Kresge Foundation and the JPB Foundation came together to study how a transition to 100% clean energy could be implemented in a 100% equitable manner. The study examined cities throughout the United States and sought proposals for how communities would facilitate an equitable transition. Ultimately, three cities were selected to implement pilot projects with this goal.

Washington, D.C., was one of the chosen cities, and SUN was invited to participate in a coalition of partners actively working to implement an equitable energy transition in the District. Other coalition members include Empower D.C. (a community organization), D.C. Fiscal Policy Institute, and the D.C. Department of Energy and Environment. As a coalition we have prioritized a community-centered approach to the problem of ensuring a just energy transition. We have recruited District residents from all eight wards of the city, with cohort members from diverse backgrounds and income levels. Our meetings focus on education regarding racial equity and clean energy.

WEST VIRGINIANS FOR  
**ENERGY  
FREEDOM**

**No Bailout for FirstEnergy!**

**EnergyFreedomWV.org**



*The West Virginians for Energy Freedom brand and message has proven an impactful, evergreen tool to influence lawmakers and public opinion on issues of energy choice, community resilience, and local decision-making.*

The coalition successfully advocated for the passage of the Clean Energy Omnibus Act of 2018 (Clean Energy D.C.), which increased the District's Renewable Portfolio Standard to 100%. Following this success, the coalition has turned its efforts toward passage of a Racial Equity Act to guarantee that energy legislation, including the Clean Energy D.C. Act, is implemented in an equitable manner.

We also have been asked to support the D.C. Department of Energy and Environment's work in developing the city's Zero Gas Emission Plan (GEP) transition. Our contributions to this work focus on making the connection between Zero GEP and housing, jobs, and other key issues that impact under resourced communities.



*We have played an important role in recruiting District residents from all eight Wards to participate in work to ensure clean energy legislation is implemented equitably.*

## Solar for All

In 2017, we were selected by the D.C. Department of Energy and Environment to design and implement its single-family Solar for All program, which is charged with helping LMI families use solar to reduce their electricity bills by at least 50%. Our primary innovation in designing this Solar for All program was to place ownership as the cornerstone. Previous low-income solar programs in the District were based on Power Purchase Agreements (PPA). This model placed liens on the participating houses, which created a burden for program participants if they wanted to sell or

move out of their homes. Many prior such programs also were complicated and difficult to understand, with participants unaware of how their solar systems worked, confused about whether or not they owned their solar arrays, and without recourse if something went wrong.

**“Thank you [Solar United Neighbors] for walking me through this process. It does not go unnoticed and unappreciated. The impact it will have on our monthly utility bill and my overall budgeting is exponential.”**

**— Delmonica Glaze**

To avoid these problems, our program focused on ownership: Each participant owned their solar system from the day it was installed, and there was no lien on the home. That means participants are able to sell their houses without additional incumbrances while fully benefiting from the myriad financial incentives available to solar owners in the District. Some families were even able to claim the federal solar income tax credit.

Through this program, we helped 73 D.C. families go solar over a period of 18 months. Over 50% of the installations occurred in areas that have been historically overlooked by the District government with regard to infrastructure investments. Members of these under resourced communities will now be able to generate wealth via energy savings – to the tune of \$23,000 per household over the next 25 years. A detailed report on this project can be found on our website.



*By focusing on system ownership, participants were able to not just reduce their energy bills, but also increase the value of their home.*

## Energy Democracy Project

The Energy Democracy Project started as a series of meetings and hard conversations and then a book collaboration between a group of organizations working in the energy democracy field. Solar United Neighbors contributed a chapter on using community-based projects as a means to build local power and advance energy democracy. We participated in a book tour in 2018 with our fellow contributors and featured the book at 2018 Solar Congress in Washington, DC. In 2019 the Energy Democracy Project was launched to formalize these collaborative efforts. SUN is currently a member of the Energy Democracy Project's Steering Committee, and we co-chair its Shared Strategy Committee along with the Democracy Collaborative.

## Developing LMI Programming in Indiana

As a result of our success with the Solar for All program in D.C., we were approached by the City of Indianapolis' Office of Sustainability to help design a low-income solar program. The City gave us space to tailor the program based on what we had learned from our experiences in D.C. We sought to streamline the program by minimizing the number of steps homeowners must take in order to become income qualified. As in D.C.'s Solar for All program, the Indianapolis program is centered around ownership. We include provisions in our agreement with the program's selected solar installer that help reduce possible financial and bureaucratic burdens of solar ownership for participating families. The Indianapolis LMI solar program is currently in progress, and we're excited to soon be able to point to another successful example of solar creating wealth in low-income communities.

## Community Solar

Since 2011, Solar United Neighbors has worked with communities to find ways to share the benefits of solar when residents are not able to put it on their roofs. We focus on the potential for community solar to increase equity of access to solar energy. In the early years of our involvement in this work, we engaged with various experimental project models to find out what works and what doesn't. In 2013 and 2015, we contributed to key legislative victories that established statewide community solar programs in Washington, D.C., and Maryland, respectively. Today, we continue our work to bring true community solar to states like Pennsylvania and Ohio, advocating for well-planned policies that ensure these programs deliver equitable access and real cost savings to LMI households.

## Puerto Rico

We are currently working with local organizations to pilot a solar co-op in Puerto Rico. The pilot focuses on helping families install solar systems that include battery backup power. After Hurricane Maria devastated the island in 2017, Puerto Rico's entire electricity grid was inoperable for several months. In the wake of this tragedy, energy storage and resilience has emerged as a primary concern for local residents.



*Community solar is a critical tool that allows anyone to go solar, even if they live in an apartment building or don't own a home.*

We are working with the University Gardens neighborhood, a suburb of approximately 1,000 homes near San Juan. The community's Board of Directors invited us to design and facilitate a program that will provide solar education to local community members and will help local families navigate the process of going solar with backup battery storage. The Board has identified 80-100 residents who are interested in the program and are in talks with local credit unions to develop an affordable solar loan product to make the project more accessible to residents of all income levels. We have already identified two additional nearby communities that would like to organize similar solar + storage bulk purchase programs. Our goal is to be able to quickly scale up solar resiliency on the island.

## Statement of Fundraising Needs

We are currently seeking \$550,000 in funds to build an effective national Energy Equity and Inclusion program:

### *Funds to create an Energy Equity and Inclusion national program*

- » \$150,000 for investing in program leadership, building partnerships, and technical assistance.
- » \$250,000 to support local communities and seed pilot projects in strategic locations
- » \$150,000 for policy campaigns

### *How will it be implemented:*

- » Building local partnerships and supporting frontline communities by responding to requests for technical assistance.
- » Helping build meaningful low-income solar and energy democracy pilot programs.
- » Scaling local and state advocacy efforts and advancing equity goals in collaboration with local partners
- » National advocacy on key strategic policy interventions

*We are excited to continue and expand this work!*

