



A Brighter Energy Future for Regions: An Introduction to SolSmart's Regional Organization Pathway

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Supporting Regional Organizations as New Partners on the SolSmart Team



Contact: Brett Schwartz – bschwartz@nado.org
Ciara Ristig – cristig@nado.org

Contact: Jessica Routzahn - jessica@narc.org

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- A recording of the webinar and presentations slides will be made available soon at www.nado.org, www.narc.org & www.solsmart.org
- Please provide feedback on the post-webinar survey – thanks!



Today's Presenters

Danny Falk, Program Manager
Interstate Renewable Energy Council



Andrew Light, Program Manager
Interstate Renewable Energy Council

Kevin Byrd, Executive Director
New River Valley Regional Commission (VA)



Aphi Fancon, Senior Planner
New River Valley Regional Commission (VA)

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SolSmart Regional Organization Pathway

Daniel Falk

Program Manager,
IREC

dannyf@irecusa.org



Acknowledgment and Disclaimer

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What is SolSmart?

SolSmart is a national designation and technical assistance program that helps local governments make it faster, easier, and more affordable for residents and businesses to go solar.

A SolSmart designation:

- Recognizes communities that have taken key steps to address local barriers to solar energy and foster the growth of mature local solar markets.
- Demonstrates that a community is “**open for solar business,**” making it attractive to solar industries.

SolSmart provides **targeted, no-cost technical assistance** to help communities reduce soft costs and earn SolSmart designation

SolSmart Actions



Increase transparency

- Collaborate with local departments to create a regional inspection checklist
- Post a solar landing page

Increase understanding

- Provide training on solar PV to staff working in permitting
- Provide guidance on planning and zoning best practices for solar PV

Reduce barriers

- Offer procedure for recording solar easements for property owners
- Coordinate with member communities to engage utilities



The Role of Regional Organizations

The involvement of Regional Organizations in the SolSmart program provides several advantages to the communities it serves:

- Create a cohesive plan for the entire region
- Bring a local perspective to adoption of best practices
- Provide a platform for the communities to share ideas and problem solve
- Provide economies of scale with respect to training sessions and engagement with utilities and community

Benefits of SolSmart to Regional Organizations



- Designation
- Technical Assistance
- Regional Resources on Solar



Designation Pathways

- Standard Pathway
 - 2 foundational categories plus 3 special focus categories
 - 7-8 pre-requisite credits
- Modified Pathway
 - 5 pre-requisite credits plus 4 special focus categories
- **Regional Organization Pathway**
 - **7 pre-requisite credits plus 5 special focus categories**

Core Competencies: Criteria and Designation

- 38 unique credits in 5 different categories that promote best practices to help local governments improve their solar markets
- Each credit has a corresponding point value ranging from 5 to 20
- Special Focus Categories:
 - Planning, Zoning and Development
 - Solar Rights
 - Utility Engagement
 - Community Engagement
 - Market Development & Finance

"The SolSmart program created a national benchmark for communities to reach and provided the guidance and resources to support adoption of best practices in solar policy."— Maurice Jones, City Manager, Charlottesville, Virginia

Designation Structure

To receive designation, regional organizations must complete the following:



Complete 5 prerequisites
50 total points

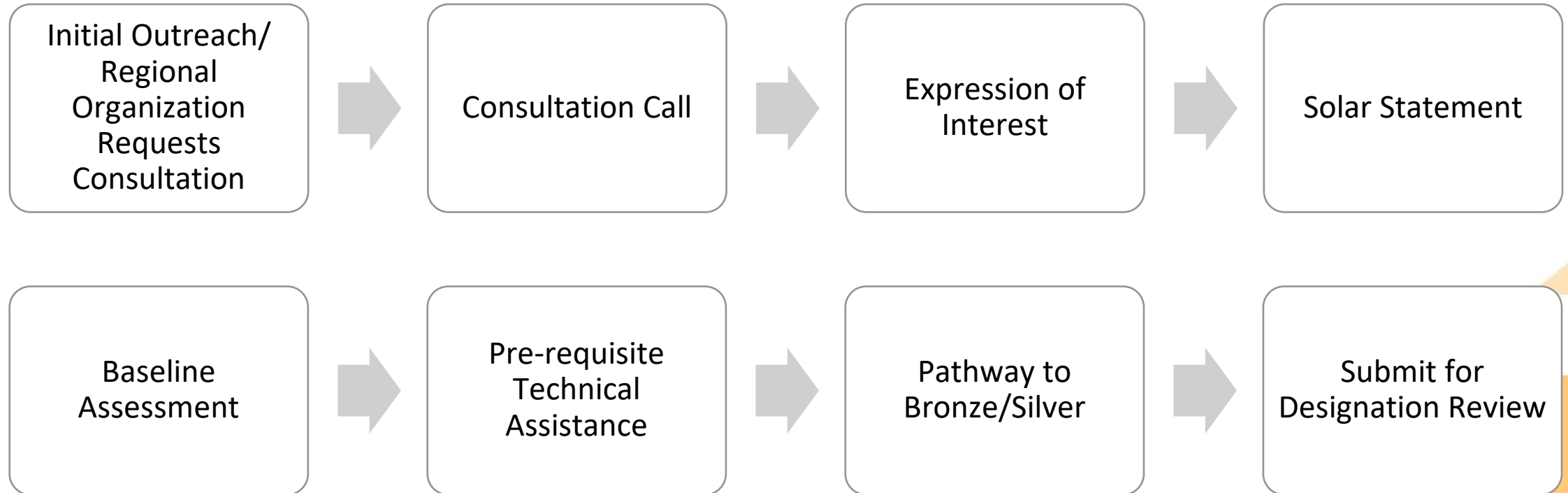


Attain SolSmart Bronze and
Complete 1 Silver pre-reqs
80 total points



Attain SolSmart Silver and
Complete 1 Gold pre-reqs
110 total points

Process Overview



Key Accomplishments: SolSmart by the Numbers

- 41 states + District of Columbia
- Represents about 101 million people (over 1 in 4 U.S. residents)
- Regional Organization Pathway: 9 Designated Regional Organizations
- SolSmart increases installed capacity by 67% or 69kW/month, and the number of installations by 62% or 3 systems/month on average in a community.
- Across the country, SolSmart is associated with an additional 25MW/month of installed capacity and 1,068 installations/month.



160



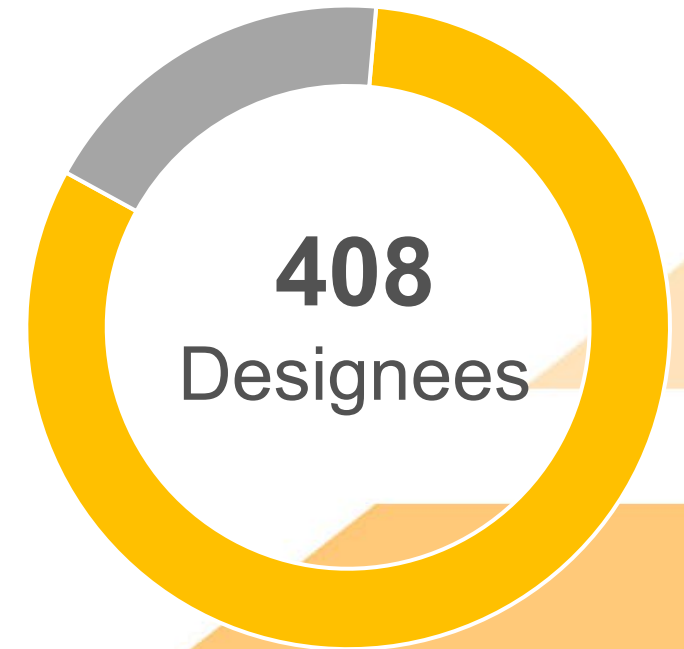
98



150

■ Total

■ Left to 500 Goal



Program Design and Execution

Technical Assistance Program



**GREAT PLAINS
INSTITUTE**



NARC
Building Regional Communities
National Association of Regional Councils



CADMUS



Designation Program Administrator



Leaders at the Core of Better Communities



Home Innovation
RESEARCH LABS™



CADMUS



www.solsmart.org

Pre-requisite Credits

- PR-1: Provide a document that demonstrates your regional organization’s commitment to pursue SolSmart designation.
- PR-2: Provide guidance on solar PV planning, zoning and development best practices to communities and counties in the entire region through webinars, in-person meetings, one-on-one calls or trainings
- PR-3: Collaborate with local inspection departments to develop an inspection checklist for the region, and share results region-wide through webinars, in-person meetings, training and/or the regional website. Encourage communities to integrate the checklist into their inspection processes.
- PR-4: Host regional training or discussion on best practices in solar permitting for communities and counties and introduce the SolSmart program and process.
- PR-5: Post a solar landing page on the regional website with information on the region’s solar goals and local resources for solar development, including the inspection checklist developed in PR-3.
- PR-6: Include quantifiable metrics and/or specific actions for solar PV development in the most current version of relevant region-wide plans (e.g. energy plan, comprehensive plan, economic development plan). (Required for Silver)
- PR-7: Meet the threshold of SolSmart designations in your region. Potential designees are municipalities and counties that are members of a regional organization and have the jurisdiction required to achieve SolSmart designation. (Required for Gold)

| Localities in the regional organization | Number of SolSmart designees |
|---|------------------------------|
| Up to 10 | 40% of localities (1-4) |
| 11-25 | 35% of localities (4-9) |
| 26-50 | 30% of localities (8-15) |
| 51+ | 16+ designations |

Technical Assistance

- SolSmart TA providers work with regional organization officials, elected officials, local government staff, and community members to help communities update processes using established best practices
- Funded by SolSmart, no-cost to the community
- Regional organizations and communities need to commit staff time to working with SolSmart
- Regional organizations and communities must demonstrate a commitment to achieving designation
- TA Delivery
 - Online – resource library, email, webinars, templates
 - Phone – conference calls
 - In person – site visits, technical workshops

Submission Process and Requirements

- Consultation call with SolSmart staff
- Work with technical assistance providers to complete necessary credits (for at least bronze designation)
- Gather proper documentation to verify a credit has been achieved
 - Link
 - Memo
 - Policy Document
- Submit for designation through SolSmart's online process
 - TA providers can help you here too!

SolSmart Website Resources



- [Solsmart.org/permitting](https://solsmart.org/permitting)
- [Solsmart.org/solar-energy-a-toolkit](https://solsmart.org/solar-energy-a-toolkit) for local governments

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction

The Federal and State Context: Policies Affecting Solar Energy Development

This section provides a high-level overview of federal and state policies and programs that impact solar energy development.

Stakeholder Engagement

This section provides guidance to municipal and county staff on how to develop and implement an engagement strategy; including an overview of the relevant stakeholder groups; key topics; and tactics for making this engagement as effective as possible.

Planning, Zoning, & Development

This section provides information on how local governments can incorporate solar energy goals into local planning documents, such as comprehensive plans, functional plans, or small area plans.

Solar PV Construction: Codes, Permitting, and Inspection

This section provides a general overview of the permitting and inspection process in the United States, followed by a discussion of best practices for improving the permitting and inspection process at the local level.

Residential Issues and Existing Regulatory Framework

This section goes over the key areas of a residential transaction, applicable laws, and resources that local governments can provide to help educate and protect consumers.

Utility Engagement

This section will provide detail on how electric utilities operate, along with the questions and concerns that are likely to arise as solar energy use expands. This will help local governments engage with utilities as they work toward their solar energy development goals.



COMMUNITY APPLICATION SIGN UP FOR UPDATES

HOW WE HELP

OUR DESIGNEES

RESOURCES

NEWS

GET STARTED



Solar Energy: SolSmart's Toolkit For Local Governments



UPCOMING Webinar: SolSmart 101 (3/3)



SolSmart Issue Brief: Solar & Electrification, A Beneficial Partnership

SOLAR ENERGY TOOLKIT

SIMPLIFIED SOLAR PERMITTING GUIDE

VIEW ALL RESOURCES



www.solsmart.org

SolSmart Webinars

- Solsmart.org/resources
 - Sort by Webinars
- Best Practices in Solar Planning & Zoning
 - <https://www.solsmart.org/resources/best-practices-in-solar-planning-and-zoning-webinar/>
- Planning & Zoning Best Practices for Large-scale Solar
 - <https://www.solsmart.org/resources/solsmart-webinar-planning-zoning-best-practices-for-large-scale-solar/>
- Best Practices for Solar PV Inspection
 - <https://www.solsmart.org/resources/solsmart-workshop-best-practices-for-solar-pv-inspection-session-3-inspection/>
- How to Develop a Solarize Campaign
 - <https://www.solsmart.org/resources/solsmart-webinar-how-to-develop-a-solarize-campaign/>
- Solar & Electric Vehicle Best Practices for Local Governments
 - <https://www.solsmart.org/resources/upcoming-webinar-7-31-what-local-governments-need-to-know-coordinating-efforts-on-solar-pv-and-electric-vehicles/>



Webinars, Planning

SOLSMART WEBINAR: PLANNING & ZONING BEST PRACTICES FOR LARGE-SCALE SOLAR

Related Criteria:

- PZD-9

[+ VIEW NOW](#)



Webinars, Community Engagement

SOLSMART WEBINAR: HOW TO DEVELOP A SOLARIZE CAMPAIGN

Related Criteria:

- CE-4a

[+ VIEW NOW](#)

Andrew Light

Program Manager,
IREC

andrewl@irecusa.org



SolSmart Program Evaluation: What We Found

SolSmart commissioned a third-party evaluation led by four universities (Missouri University of Science & Technology, Florida State University, University of Miami, and University of Texas at Austin) to look at the impact of the program on local governments and make recommendations for improvement.



- SolSmart-designated communities **increased their solar capacity** by 69 kW per month on average — a 67% increase. The **number of installations** increased by 62%, or 3 systems per month on average.
- Across the country, SolSmart led to approximately **300-450 MW of additional solar capacity** and 12,800-19,200 new installations.

Key Findings

- SolSmart speeds up the permitting process for solar installations by 7.5 days on average — reducing delays for local governments, solar companies, and consumers.
- In surveys, local government and industry officials say the biggest impact of SolSmart is **increased local knowledge about solar energy**.
- SolSmart delivers for communities: \$10 million in taxpayer funds for SolSmart led to **\$1-2 billion in additional solar investment**.
- While it has a positive impact on the permitting process, data show that SolSmart does not speed up the process for inspection and interconnection or the overall installation process.

How We'll Follow Up

The research also provided useful information on why communities become involved with SolSmart and possible barriers to success. To follow up, the SolSmart program is:

- Increasing outreach to encourage new communities to participate in SolSmart, particularly communities that are **under-resourced** or have difficulty meeting staff needs. 
- Working to ensure that SolSmart encourages **equitable outcomes** and improves access to solar for all populations. 
- Evaluating and improving the **SolSmart criteria** to focus on actions that achieve the greatest impact.
- Considering new strategies to improve **inspection times** to create a faster installation process overall.

Addressing Local Capacity via Regional Organizations

As SolSmart increases efforts to reach underserved and under-resourced communities, one response we often receive is that the community has a lack of capacity

- Time
- Resources
- Staff
- Expertise

Regional Organizations are key to bridging this gap so all communities have an equitable opportunity to participate in the clean energy revolution.

Addressing Local Capacity via Regional Organizations

Involvement of Regional Organizations in the SolSmart program provides several advantages in the capacity it offers to the communities it serves:

- Create a cohesive plan for the entire region
- Bring a local perspective to adoption of best practices
- Provide a platform for the communities to share ideas and problem solve
- Provide economies of scale with respect to training sessions and engagement with utilities and community

In short, ***regional organizations help remove capacity barriers*** for communities that would otherwise be unable to benefit from the SolSmart program.

Benefits of SolSmart to Regional Organizations

SolSmart Designation:

- Earn a nationally recognized designation at the Bronze, Silver, or Gold-level, from the premier solar program for local governments and regional organizations, which is backed by the U.S. Department of Energy Solar Energy Technologies Office
- Receive national recognition for your leadership in advancing solar across the region
 - Raise awareness of your regional organization's expertise in solar
 - A SolSmart designation is a great way to distinguish yourself from other organizations as you apply for funding and grants
- Once designated, SolSmart will showcase your regional organization's achievements via:
 - SolSmart website, social media, and newsletter
 - Press and media opportunities
 - Public events and announcements



Benefits of SolSmart to Regional Organizations

SolSmart Technical Assistance:

- Access no-cost technical assistance and training to better serve your local communities
 - SolSmart's team of national solar experts have decades of combined experience in solar energy, along with thousands of hours of previous technical assistance provision to municipal and county governments
- Support your region in becoming more competitive and open new doors to business growth, workforce development, and wider economic prosperity
- Enhance your region's solar market and signal to solar installers and developers that it's "open for solar business"



Benefits of SolSmart to Regional Organizations

Strengthen the regional resources on solar:

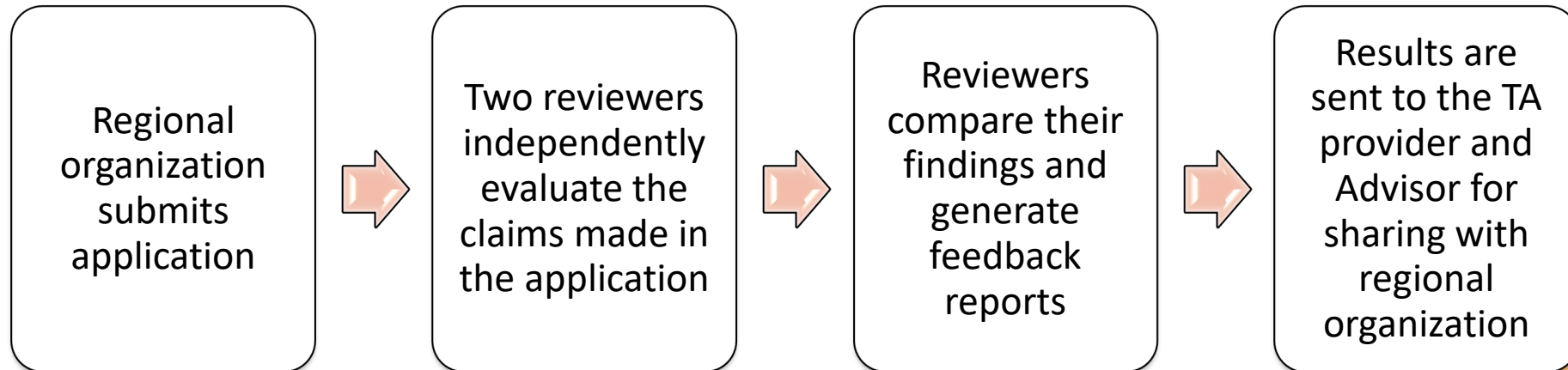
- Permitting
- Planning, Zoning and Development Regulations
- Inspections
- Construction Codes
- Solar Rights
- Utility Engagement
- Community Engagement
- Market Development & Finance



Appendix

Designation Review Process

- Ensure that applicants are **evaluated fairly**
- Ensure that the SolSmart designation is **meaningful, robust, and highly valued**
- Provide **input regarding possible improvement** to solar policies
- Discover particularly **noteworthy accomplishments** to highlight for press releases



Promoting a Community Designation

Designation Notification

- Each time your regional organization achieves a level of designation, the DPA team will send your organization an official notification of their designation.
- Designee Communications Toolkit – your regional organization will receive a toolkit that corresponds with their designation level (Bronze, Silver, or Gold).
- Organization receives notification of designation announcement and any corresponding event

Designation Promotion

- Designated regional organizations will be invited to take place in a designation event/activity. The program will also announce designations through a variety of digital channels
- Advisors will also help regional organizations announce and promote their designation



Kevin Byrd | Executive Director

Aphi Fancon | Senior Planner

How we got started

- SolSmart Regional Designation program launched in March 2019
- Board presentation in May 2019 for support on the designation process.
- Following Board support, prepared the Solar Statement



Goals for Our Region

| | |
|---------|--|
| Play | A key role in advancing solar efforts in our region |
| Provide | Solar best practice resources for member local governments in our region |
| Provide | Repository of information and educational resources for member local governments, solar consumers and installers |

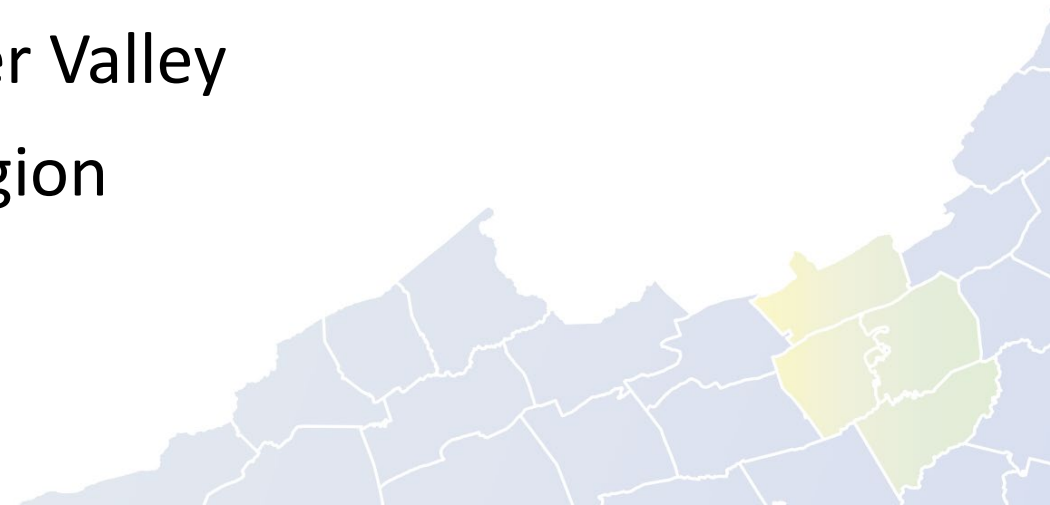


- HOME
- ABOUT US
- WHAT WE DO
- BUSINESS CONTINUITY
- PUBLICATIONS
- DATA
- RESOURCES
- CONTACT US
- BLOG
- EMPLOYMENT
- RFPs

Search ...



- Created webpage for hosting solar information and resources
- Hosted webinar for planners in the New River Valley
- Hosted training for permitting staff in the region



SCORE CARD



| Status Options and Definitions |
|--|
| Verified: Credit verified by SolSmart Review Team, points awarded |
| Not Verified: Credit not verified by SolSmart Review Team, points not awarded |
| For Review: Credit complete but not verified by SolSmart Review Team |
| TA Plan: TA engagement; points in progress |
| N/A: Credit not attainable or of interest for the community |

| | |
|--------------------|----|
| Points in Progress | 30 |
| Verified Points | 0 |
| Total Points | 30 |

Mark with an X

| Credit | Status | Points | Possible Points | Verification Link(s) | Document Upload | Comments |
|--------|--------|--------|-----------------|----------------------|-----------------|----------|
|--------|--------|--------|-----------------|----------------------|-----------------|----------|

Solar Statement

| | | | | | | |
|---|------------|---|---|--|--|---------------|
| PR-1: A letter Indicating commitment to pursuing SolSmart designation and supporting solar development locally. (Required for Participation) | For Review | 0 | 0 | | | Received 6/27 |
|---|------------|---|---|--|--|---------------|

Regional Organization Required Credits

| | | | | | | |
|---|------------|---|---|---|--|--|
| PR-2: Provide guidance on solar PV planning, zoning and development best practices to communities and counties in the entire region through webinars, in-person meetings, one-on-one calls or trainings. (Required for Bronze) | TA Plan | 0 | 0 | | | 190816 NK: planning lunch discussion. |
| PR-3: Collaborate with local inspection departments to develop an inspection checklist for the region, and share results region-wide through webinars, in-person meetings, training and/or the regional website. Encourage communities to integrate the checklist into their inspection processes. (Required for Bronze) | TA Plan | 0 | 0 | | | 190816 NK: send an email encouraging communities to adopt the model inspection checklist and watch the session 3 webinar on inspections. |
| PR-4: Host regional training or discussion on best practices in solar permitting for communities and counties and introduce the SolSmart program and process. (Required for Bronze) | TA Plan | 0 | 0 | | | 190816 NK: can do a virtual webinar to educate building officials and permitting staff. |
| PR-5: Post a solar landing page on the regional website with information on the region's solar goals and local resources for solar development, including the inspection checklist developed in PR-3. (Required for Bronze) | For Review | 0 | 0 | ://nrvrc.org/solarizenrv/ | | 190701 NK: Template provided in email sent on 7/1. |




Our steps to acquire this designation

- NRVRC Regional Energy Planning
- Local Technical Assistance
 - Zoning Ordinance
 - Proposed regulation for roof mount solar and ground mounted solar under the accessory uses and structure requirements
- Comprehensive Plans updates:
 - Draft policies for Land Use, Economic Development and Housing elements regarding renewable energy, energy efficiency and reducing energy cost

Steps towards Silver

- We need additional 30 points!
 - Work with Virginia SolSmart advisors to conduct a high-level feasibility analysis for **solar PV on brownfields**
 - Provide **technical assistance** for any community interested in considering a solar installation on a brownfield
 - Add solar energy as a standing agenda item **at regional planner's group** meetings
 - Create **energy task force** or solar working group



keep going...

A wide-angle, low-perspective shot of a vast solar farm. The solar panels are arranged in a precise grid that recedes into the distance, creating a strong sense of depth. The sky is a vibrant, clear blue, punctuated by several soft, white cumulus clouds. The overall scene is bright and clean, symbolizing renewable energy and a sustainable future.

Questions / Comments / Reflections