



Environment America's [State of Solar map](#) shows how state and city progress often coincide.

STATE POLICIES CAN SHAPE YOUR COMMUNITY'S SUCCESS

America's cities, as centers of population growth and energy consumption, must lead the way in building a grid powered by clean, renewable energy. However, state policies can have a sizeable impact on a city's ability to expand solar energy. [Research shows](#) that solar energy policies – more than the availability of sunshine – dictate which states and, by extension, cities have successful solar industries and which do not. Cities can shine brighter when their state's energy policy landscape supports renewable energy development, and should advocate for helpful state policies in addition to shaping their own.

LOCAL VOICES CAN SHAPE STATE DECISIONS

Cities have a unique opportunity to influence the decisions made by their state elected officials and regulatory bodies in favor of policies that support the advancement of solar and renewables. Because mayors, city councilmembers, and other local officials represent their community's interests, their recommendations carry more weight than those of a single citizen and are more likely to affect state level policy decisions. Local leaders should leverage their influence to ensure that the state energy policy landscape is as conducive to their community's renewable energy transition as possible.

POLICIES TO ADVOCATE FOR

From renewable energy standards to incentive programs, many state policies affect a city's solar energy potential. The [most effective policies](#) facilitate the widespread adoption of small-scale solar energy systems on homes, businesses, and other institutions, while also encouraging large projects. [Examples](#) of state solar policies worth advocating for include:

Strong renewable energy targets for utilities, including specific requirements for solar energy adoption: States should adopt or increase mandatory renewable energy standards with solar carve-outs that require a significant and growing share of the state's electricity to come from the sun.

Strong statewide interconnection and net metering policies: These critical policies ensure that individuals and businesses are appropriately compensated for the electricity that they provide to the grid and allow them to move seamlessly between producing their own electricity and using electricity from the grid when the sun is not shining.

Electric rate designs that encourage solar adoption, rather than disincentivizing it: Utilities may propose rate designs that add or increase charges to the electric bills of customers with rooftop solar arrays, including demand charges, increases

in fixed charges, and higher rates. Structures like these limit the benefits of adopting solar energy, causing solar customers to pay almost as much on their energy bills as traditional customers, despite using far less energy from the utility over the course of a month. State governments should reject unfair proposals like this that discourage customers from switching to solar energy.

Authorization of programs that expand access: According to the National Renewable Energy lab, 49 percent of Americans don't own a home, have shading on their homes, or cannot afford a solar energy system. Policies that allow virtual or aggregate net metering and community solar enable low-income households, renters and apartment dwellers to collectively own solar energy systems and share in the net metering credits they generate. Enabling PACE financing can also expand access to solar power.

Public benefits charges on utility bills or other sustainable financing mechanisms for solar energy: These practices help fund solar energy for low-income households, non-profits, small businesses, and local municipalities to ensure that everyone has access to the benefits of solar power.

Authorization of third-party sales of electricity: Financing rooftop solar energy systems through third-party electricity sales significantly lowers the up-front cost of installing solar PV systems for commercial and residential consumers. States should allow companies that install solar panels to sell electricity to their customers without subjecting them to the same regulations as large utilities.

Tax credits, rebates and grants for solar energy installations: These financial incentives are powerful tools that have made solar energy a financial option for many more Americans. In 2015, six of the 10 states with the most solar capacity per capita offered tax credits for solar installations, and four offered rebates or grants.

Policies that support energy storage, electric vehicle smart charging and microgrids: State governments should design policies that facilitate the transition from a power grid reliant on large, centralized power plants to a "smart" grid, in which electricity is produced at thousands of locations and shared across an increasingly nimble and sophisticated infrastructure. Such state policies should support the expansion of energy storage technologies, electric vehicle smart charging networks and microgrids, as important steps in powering all sectors of our society with renewable energy.

WHAT ADVOCACY CAN LOOK LIKE

Local elected officials have access to a wide variety of means to advocate for state energy policies that will set their communities up for success. A few of those options include:

- Lobbying state decision makers directly to make the case for the necessity of solar energy in your state's future and the policies that will help it grow.
- Joining in coalition with other local governments, stakeholders, or advocacy groups. Teaming up with other cities or elected officials, through a state municipal league, or via a national campaign such as Environment America's Mayors for Solar Energy can amplify the impact of your advocacy, and can also allow for collaboration with peers.
- Including the topic of renewable energy policies in public speeches, writing opinion pieces for local and state media outlets, and posting relevant content on social media allow elected officials to use the audience that comes with their position to build public support for strong energy policies.
- Leading by example with strong local policies can also encourage your state to step up to bat. For example, California only adopted a statewide policy to include solar on all new homes after dozens of cities throughout the state implemented similar policies with success.

RESOURCES

- *The Solar Energy Industries Association's [State of the States](#) report provides more detail on state policies that impact solar energy development.*
- *Learn more about our [Mayors for Solar Energy project](#) and [join](#) over 300 pro-solar local leaders today.*
- *Consider membership through the [National League of Cities'](#) state leagues or the [U.S. Conference of Mayors](#).*