

Commerce earns two DOE SunShot Initiative grants to boost state's solar capacity

The Minnesota Department of Commerce has been awarded two U.S. Department of Energy SunShot Initiative grants—one focused on helping the state reach its goal of 10 percent solar by 2030 and the other to make solar more accessible for low- to moderate-income people in Minnesota.

The grants, [announced by DOE on Oct. 20](#), are part of \$21.4 million allocated for 17 projects nationwide intended to spread solar adoption. The competitive grant projects support the SunShot Initiative's ongoing work to enable the widespread deployment of safe, reliable and cost-effective solar energy by developing strategies and solutions that directly reduce the costs and barriers to solar access and deployment.

Project North Star: Illuminating the Way to PV Integration

Commerce has been awarded a \$2 million grant that will help realize Minnesota's goal of generating 10 percent of its electricity from the sun by 2030. The grant is called "Project North Star: Illuminating the Way to PV Integration" and it will combine a stakeholder collaboration process with technical analysis to support Minnesota's deployment of solar electricity, or solar photovoltaics (PV).

"Diversifying Minnesota's energy portfolio with additional solar electricity will create new economic opportunities for people across our state, while reducing our dependence on fossil fuels that hurt our health and environment," said Lt. Governor Tina Smith.

The state goal of 10 percent solar by 2030 will take Minnesota from 35 megawatts of solar capacity at the end of 2015 to as much as 6 gigawatts by 2030. (One gigawatt equals 1,000 megawatts.)

"This important grant will strengthen Minnesota's efforts to continue moving forward to a clean energy future," said Commerce Commissioner Mike Rothman. "Project North Star is an opportunity for the Commerce Department to work together with our many partners and stakeholders to make Minnesota a leading state for solar innovation and deployment."

Led by the Commerce Department, Project North Star includes four core partners: Center for Energy and Environment, Clean Energy Resource Teams (CERTs), Clean Power Research and Great Plains Institute. It also involves a host of supporting partners, including utilities, local governments and solar industry representatives.

The project will engage in a wide range of activities with these stakeholders to identify and demonstrate least-cost, best-value strategies for Minnesota to achieve its solar energy goals. This includes the potential of key technologies and management approaches to overcome grid integration challenges with increased solar. It will identify barriers to deployment while laying a technical foundation to understand how much solar capacity potential exists across Minnesota.

Minnesota partners with CESA to bring solar to low- to moderate-income households

The second grant project focuses on empowering Connecticut, Minnesota, New Mexico, Oregon, Rhode Island, and the District of Columbia to develop and implement strategies for expanding the amount of solar available to low- and moderate-income (LMI) residents and communities. Each participating state is developing goals and a plan of action that matches its programmatic needs, demographic profile, solar potential, and financial resources.

The Clean Energy States Alliance (CESA), a national nonprofit organization, will coordinate the \$1.73 million multi-state project to make solar more available to people of all income levels.

The Commerce Department will be the lead agency for Minnesota's participation in the project and will work closely with Xcel Energy, the state's largest investor-owned utility. Over the next three years, the department will collaborate with utility, solar industry and community stakeholders to develop and implement promising strategies to promote broader access to solar in Minnesota.

"The sun shines on everyone, so it is only fair that solar power should be an option available to everyone," said Rothman. "Minnesota is poised to make major progress with the growth of solar power, and it is important that all Minnesotans have the opportunity to share in this progress."

Expanding solar for low- and moderate-income Minnesota households will help support the state's solar energy goals. In 2013, Minnesota passed the Solar Energy Standard that requires investor-owned utilities to obtain 1.5 percent of their electric power from solar by 2020, with a goal of 10 percent by 2030.

Consumers at all income levels can potentially save money by going solar, but low- and moderate-income households have faced barriers to participation in the solar market. Reducing these barriers will allow more Minnesotans to share in the financial, environmental and other benefits of solar power.

"This project will tackle one of the most important challenges facing future solar development," said Warren Leon, Executive Director of CESA. "The participating states are all committed to expanding low-income access to solar power and ensuring that solar development proceeds in an equitable manner. We are excited to be partnering with them."