

EVERGREEN STATE SOLAR PARTNERSHIP



Streamlined Interconnection & Net Metering for Rooftop Solar

BACKGROUND

Interconnection is the process by which a solar system is connected to and made interactive with the existing utility grid. Net metering is a billing arrangement whereby an electric customer can pay their utility for the “net” of their consumption minus their production. Together, streamlined interconnection and net metering are essential to cost-effectively realizing the benefits of solar power. This fact sheet summarizes efforts by the utilities participating in the Evergreen State Solar Partnership (ESSP) to streamline interconnection processes and improve net metering policies.

BEST PRACTICES: NET METERING POLICY

Washington earns a “B” in Freeing the Grid’s review of net metering policy. Our statewide standards that allow for customer ownership of renewable energy credits and rollover credits are examples of best practices. We could improve by removing system size limitations to allow customer to meet all on-site energy needs and by increasing program capacity (slated to rise in 2014 to .5% of utility peak demand).

BEST PRACTICES: INTERCONNECTION PROCESS

Washington earns a “D” in Freeing the Grid’s review of interconnection policy. Suggested improvements include prohibiting requirements for the redundant external disconnect switch and prohibiting requirements for additional insurance. Both of these are under review at the UTC. While the Policy is being developed, the ESSP team made the following recommendations for practice:

Application Process

- Keep the application simple. For a standard inverter-based rooftop solar system, the interconnection application should be no more than two pages plus terms and conditions.
- Combine the application for interconnection with the application for a production meter, net metering, and possibly WA Department of Revenue certification.
- Make the application form easy to find online.
- Allow multiple ways to submit the application, including online and by email.

Information Access

- Provide a single point of contact for every aspect of interconnection (i.e., application submittal, inspection scheduling, meter installation, and production incentives).
- Make it easy for the customer to check the status of the application, particularly if the process requires multiple reviews.

Process Time

- Approve standard applications (e.g., inverter-based systems under 25 kW) within three business days.

Inspection

- Make information on inspection requirements easy to access.
- Reduce time from inspection request to actual inspection.
- Provide a narrow window of time for the inspection to reduce or eliminate the on-site wait time for installers.
- Look for opportunities to eliminate redundant site visits by combining inspections.

City of Seattle

City of Bellevue

City of Ellensburg

City of Edmonds

Snohomish PUD

Seattle City Light

Ellensburg Utility

Puget Sound Energy

Northwest SEED

*Washington State
Energy Office*

*Municipal Research
Service Center*

Solar Washington

*Sustainable
Connections*



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EXPEDITING THE PROCESS

The four ESSP participating utilities (Puget Sound Energy, Seattle City Light, Snohomish PUD, and Ellensburg Energy Services) are leading the way to lower the cost of solar for their customers. They have worked collaboratively to research best practices, create action plans for improving their own processes and templates for other utilities to use to streamline their solar interconnection process. The full report and templates are available at www.nwseed.org/ESSP.asp.

- Library of Standard One-Line Diagrams
- Example EZ Application for Interconnection, Net Metering, and Production Metering

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Federal Energy Regulatory Commission Small Generator Interconnection Procedures Screens.

The FERC SGIP contains the technical procedures that a small generator and utility must follow when connecting the generator to utility lines subject to FERC jurisdiction. The standards are embodied in a single set of ten screens for the 10 kW Inverter Process and the Fast Track Process. <http://www.solarabcs.org/about/publications/reports/ferc-screens/>

IREC Model Interconnection Procedures 2013. IREC has participated in dozens of state utility commission rule makings that have focused on the development of interconnection procedures. This experience has identified several emerging best practices which are synthesized in these updated model interconnection procedures. www.irecusa.org/publications/

Washington UTC Interconnection Generators Rulemaking UE112-133. The Washington Utilities and Transportation Commission is completing a 1 1/2 year process to revise the standards for interconnecting electric generators in the service territories of electric investor-owned utilities in WAC 480-108. The proposed rules will be adopted in the summer of 2013. www.utc.wa.gov/docs/Pages/InterconnectionRulemaking.aspx

Freeing the Grid. Now in its sixth year of publication, this policy guide grades all 50 states on net metering and interconnection procedures. www.freeingthegrid.org

OPPORTUNITIES FOR FEEDBACK

We welcome comments, questions and improvements to our templates and approach. Send comments at any time directly to:

- ⚙ Linda Irvine, Northwest SEED | linda@nwseed.org
- ⚙ Tim Stearns, WA Department of Commerce | tim.stearns@commerce.wa.gov

ABOUT THE EVERGREEN STATE SOLAR PARTNERSHIP

The Evergreen State Solar Partnership is one of 22 teams working under the U.S. Department of Energy's Rooftop Solar Challenge program, a nationwide effort to reduce the soft costs associated with installing rooftop solar electricity. ESSP aims to make the process of going solar simpler, faster, and more cost effective by streamlining and standardizing permitting and interconnection, improving interconnection standards, promoting solar-friendly planning and zoning, and expanding financing options.

The U.S. has over 7,700 MW of installed solar electric capacity, enough to power more than 1.2 million American households.

The number of solar installations in Washington grew by 34% in 2012.

Washington has installed 2.5 watts of solar per capita compared to 399 in Germany.

The cost of installing solar in the U.S. is nearly double the cost in Germany, due mainly to the costs of permitting, interconnection and customer acquisition.

