



Solar Power in Your Community

A guide for local governments on how to increase access to and deployment of solar PV.

Types of Solar

There are four main types of photovoltaic solar deployment which local governments may consider in their planning. The types of solar are differentiated by their size and scale. Understanding the differences between the types of solar deployment can help local governments identify the scale of solar deployment that can best meet community needs. Although each category does not have a standard size, these definitions include the typical size range for each type.

- Residential solar: Also referred to as “rooftop solar”, residential solar is a form of distributed energy with solar panels mounted on individual rooftops. Residential solar deployments can range in size from 3 kW–11 kW (Feldman et al. 2021).
- Commercial solar: Commercial solar is a larger form of distributed solar energy that encompasses rooftop and ground-mounted deployment. Commercial solar deployments can range in size from 100 kW–2 MW (Feldman et al. 2021).
- Community solar: Also referred to as “solar gardens” or “shared solar”, community solar is another form of distributed energy where customers can buy or lease a portion of an off-site shared solar project. Community solar sites are typically <5 MW in size. See more information on community solar in Section 6.2.
- Utility-scale solar: Utility-scale solar deployments are ground-mounted systems that feed the generated electricity directly into the electric grid. Utility-scale solar deployments can range in size from 5–100 MW (Feldman et al. 2021).

The size estimates included here are not strict boundaries, and state or local laws may define solar deployment sizes differently. This guidebook focuses primarily on residential and community solar. Innovative applications of solar energy, like agrivoltaics or floatovoltaics, fall within these categories depending on the scale at which they are deployed. See Section 6.4 for more information on innovative solar deployment.

Low- and Moderate-Income Targets

Solar targets specific to LMI communities can help ensure more equitable solar deployment at the local level, but will require a clear definition of LMI in order to set goals. LMI-specific targets may also exist at the state level. For example, some states, such as Colorado and Oregon, have an LMI carve-out in their community solar policies that dedicates a certain percentage of community solar subscriptions to LMI households. Section 2.4 describes LMI-targeted financing options.



TIP

The following obstacles to LMI solar deployment should be considered when setting LMI-specific targets:

- Upfront installation costs and community solar subscription costs can be prohibitive for LMI households.