

Project Name:

ECHO VALLEY APARTMENTS

Rhode Island's first community solar project
at an affordable housing complex

Size:

426.24 kW_{DC}

Location:

56 Maple Ave,
West Warwick, RI 02893

of LMI customers:

100

Project Website:

<https://www.fairstead.com/communities/echo-valley/>

BEST PRACTICES

- State incentives
- No cost rooftop site
- Property owner owns the community solar
- Community solar on multi-family housing



Overview

Echo Valley Apartments is Rhode Island's first community solar project sited at an affordable housing complex. The 426.24 kW rooftop system is estimated to generate 472 MWh/year. This solar project became operational on August 25, 2020 and is 100% subscribed. 25 kW of the capacity is allocated to commercial offtakers. Any National Grid customer (in good standing) residing in Rhode Island may subscribe.

The project benefits from Rhode Island's Community Remote Distributed Generation (CRDG) program. The CRDG program started in 2015 and continues today, based on the state's allocation of capacity by project size. The Echo Valley Apartments fits into the Commercial Scale Solar category (251-500 kW DC). The developer applies during open enrollment, and submits competitive bid prices for the output of the project (not to exceed established ceiling prices). Projects are then selected based on ranking of pricing bids, and awarded a Certificate of Eligibility (COE). The COE defines the Performance Based Incentive (PBI) that will be paid out by National Grid for the lifetime of the project. Enrolled projects sell to National Grid all generated electricity, capacity, RECs, and any other environmental attributes.



Photo Credit: Fairstead



Innovative Approaches

- **Focused on the residents first.** Subscription to the solar energy capacity was focused on the residents first. A one-page subscriber agreement and no upfront costs made it easy and simple for LMI tenants to join.
- **Direct communication with residents.** PowerMarket used a door-to-door approach during initial enrollment. Enrollment was easy with their [simple website](#), which also provides a “share with a friend” option to encourage communication about the project.
- **Solar grants from the state.** The Community Renewables Program at the [Rhode Island Commerce Corporation](#) (Commerce RI) offers incentives to community solar developers. The first come, first serve program is for developers who will pass on grants to subscribers in the form of a bill credit on their community solar bill. LMI customers on the National Grid A-60 rate plan (National Grid’s low-income discount rate, must be applied for) will receive a flat rebate grant amount of \$500 per subscriber. The rebate can offset upfront costs, monthly subscription payments, rate payments, maintenance fee or other related costs.
- **Multi-family affordable housing.** The Echo Valley Apartments Community solar project is sited at an affordable housing complex.

Lessons Learned

- Word of mouth between tenants and tenant subscribers helped to promote the project. A one-page document from the property management to the tenants regarding subscription to the community solar project generated trust.
- For the developer, deadlines were critical. Once development starts, any delays impact financing. Developers need a safety net/margin of error to assure financial viability of a project.
- The construction of the community solar project coincided with a major rehabilitation project at the housing complex, improving the efficiency of both projects.
- Media coverage of community solar projects, including stories of an actual subscriber's savings, helps spread the word.



This case study is a part of the LIFT Toolkit initiative. To explore more case studies and best practices visit LIFT.Groundswell.org research@groundswell.org