



COLORADO
Energy Office



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Office of Gov. John Hickenlooper

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Colorado Energy Office, GRID Alternatives Announce Successful Completion of Low-Income Community Solar Demonstration

Statewide initiative with utility partners tested innovative approaches and created best practices to guide future state and national expansion

DENVER – Tuesday, Sept. 5, 2017 – The Colorado Energy Office (CEO) and GRID Alternatives Colorado (GRID) announce the completion of a two-year partnership focused on demonstrating the benefits of community solar for low-income communities across the state. In 2015, CEO granted GRID \$1.2 million to work with rural electric cooperatives and municipal utilities to develop accessible, affordable community solar models that provide meaningful bill savings to subscribed customers and reduce household energy burden.

In Colorado, approximately 30 percent of households—many located in rural areas—are considered energy burdened. Energy-burdened households are those that pay more than 4 percent of their income on utility bills. Of this 30 percent, 11 percent are considered energy impoverished, paying more than 10 percent of their income on utility bills.

Focused on delivering meaningful savings to participating households, the low-income community solar demonstration has successfully met the goals laid out by CEO. Working with eight utilities—Delta Montrose Electric Association, Empire Electric Association, Fort Collins Municipal Utility, Grand Valley Power, Holy Cross Energy, Poudre Valley Electric Association, San Miguel Electric Association and Yampa Valley Electric Association—the partnerships delivered nearly 1.4 megawatts of low-income subscribed capacity benefits to more than 300 households annually and leveraged over \$2 million in partner dollars.

“Many of Colorado’s residents struggle to pay their utility bills, and this demonstration was designed to explore partnerships that create new pathways to alleviate household energy burden,” said Kathleen Staks, CEO Executive Director. “Once again, partners from all over the state stepped forward to build solutions for our communities.”

Colorado is widely regarded as the birthplace of the community solar concept, pioneered by United Power through a grant from CEO. This statewide low-income demonstration continued Colorado’s innovation culture around community solar to expand access to all communities. In 2015, Grand Valley Power and GRID created the nation’s first utility-owned low-income community solar array. CEO and GRID’s demonstration built on this effort and created a learning lab in which innovative approaches were tested and best practices developed to guide future state and national expansion. The demonstration’s findings have contributed to commitments from both Xcel Energy and Black Hills Energy to develop an additional 21 megawatts of low-income community solar in Colorado.

As project implementer for the demonstration, GRID partnered with utilities to develop appropriate product offerings, construct systems, conduct customer outreach, engage project volunteers and provide job training. The projects selected were both affordable and scalable for utility partners with potential to expand across the state.

“In working with a variety of utilities, we’ve been able to develop a flexible model for low-income community solar that can be used anywhere,” said Chuck Watkins, Executive Director of GRID Alternatives Colorado. “The investment from CEO has been a win for utilities and their stakeholders, a win for energy-burdened households, and a win for solar access nationally.”

“The transformative impact in partnering with GRID Alternatives to build the country’s first utility-owned community solar project dedicated to low-income members not only helps our local communities in Colorado, it also forges a path for other communities across the nation,” said Tom Walch, Chief Executive Officer of Grand Valley Power. “The concept of serving members who would otherwise not be able to participate based on a number of limitations has been removed with this model.”

CEO and GRID’s demonstration has laid the groundwork for expansion of low-income solar development across the country. Based on Colorado’s pioneering work, several states have already announced upcoming projects and many others are in development stages of similar programs.

“Colorado has proven once again to be an innovator in delivering collaborative solutions to challenging energy problems,” continued Staks. “This demonstration shows that solutions are out there to lower energy costs, reduce carbon emissions and diversify our energy portfolio.”

A comprehensive evaluation of the demonstration including history, policy agenda and implications, project details and customer benefits will be available from CEO in the winter of 2017.

CEO, GRID and GVP will host a community event on Thursday, Sept. 7, to celebrate the completion of the eight utility projects and conclusion of the demonstration. The event will begin at 11 a.m. at 714 29 Road in Grand Junction.

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About Colorado Energy Office

The Colorado Energy Office works to deliver cost-effective energy services and advance innovative energy solutions for the benefit of all Coloradans. Go to colorado.gov/energyoffice to learn more.

About GRID Alternatives

GRID Alternatives Colorado is an affiliate of GRID Alternatives, the nation’s largest nonprofit solar installer, bringing clean energy technology and job training to low-income families and underserved communities through a network of community partners, volunteers and philanthropic supporters. For more information, visit gridalternatives.org/colorado.

About Grand Valley Power

Formed in 1936, Grand Valley Power was the first rural electric cooperative organized in Colorado. Serving over 17,000 customers within the Grand Valley, Plateau Valley and Mesa County area, Grand Valley Power is dedicated to empowering lives with hometown service. See <http://www.gvp.org> for more details.