Community Ownership of Solar with Cleveland Owns

A Case Study on the Founding of the Cleveland Solar Cooperative

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Set Up

- Click unmute and Start Video to say hello
- Click Participants and Chat
Rename yourself: Find your name at the top of the Participants list, click “More” then “Rename”. Add your pronouns & organization.

Cleveland Owns and CSC are fighting for Energy Democracy - community-controlled energy that meets the needs of all.
Click arrow next to **Live Transcript** and click **Show Subtitle**
Be Present

- Choose how you want to be in this space to support your learning
- Remove distractions
- Get drink/food
- Get note-taking stuff
What we’re going to cover today

Agenda

- Welcome & Overview
- Case Study on the Founding of the Cleveland Solar Cooperative with Jonathan Welle
- Discussion and Q&A!
- Closing
About the Climate Advocacy Lab

We equip the US climate movement with the **evidence-based insights, skills, and connections** needed to build durable power and win equitable solutions.
The Climate Advocacy Lab is here for you!

Want to become a (free) member? Join at climateadvocacylab.org/become-a-member
The Climate Justice Microgrant Program

- Documenting and amplifying “lessons learned”
- Building a greater body of knowledge that provides actionable insights
- Sparks opportunities for cross-organizational learning
Cleveland Solar Cooperative - An experiment in community ownership of solar

Jonathan Welle
March 2023
Big thank you to the Climate Advocacy Lab for being a supporter of our work!
Cleveland Owns and CSC are fighting for Energy Democracy - community-controlled energy that meets the needs of all
Building Ohio’s first community-owned solar array builds power for other progress on Energy Democracy.
The Just Transition framework from the Climate Justice Alliance puts Energy Democracy in context

Source: https://climatejusticealliance.org/just-transition/
Cleveland Owns began incubating Cleveland Solar Cooperative in 2019

- Cleveland Solar Cooperative (www.clevelandsolar.org) is a member-owned solar developer
- Today CSC has 35 member owners and an active board of 5
- Our goal is to grow to 200 member-owners and build our first project: a 91-kilowatt solar array on the roof of a large nonprofit
Cleveland Solar Cooperative’s financing model

A. CSC Member Owners pool their money
B. CSC purchases and installs solar panels on the roof of a host
C. The host receive bill credits via net metering by the utility
D. The host returns some of their savings to CSC, where Member Owners decide how to spend that revenue

Our thanks to People Power Solar Cooperative for making ‘the commons model’ accessible and for sharing their graphics © https://www.peoplepowersolar.org/projects
We’ve faced four primary challenges

- Organizing
- Making the legal and financial model work
- Finding a host
- Funding to hire good people
Challenge #1: Organizing

- Who are my people?
- What do my people want?
- What resources do we need to get what we want?
- How are we going to get and use those resources?
- How does our strategy develop leadership?
Challenge #2: Making the legal model work

- We needed a way to make decisions that is highly democratic and effective
  - Ohio’s cooperative law was best of several options
- We wanted to raise money from large numbers of residents without triggering securities regulations
  - Ohio’s co-op law enables us to invite member-owners to lend money to CSC for specific projects
- Pro bono legal support from Legal Aid has been *critical*
Challenge #2: Making the financial model work

- Starting PPA rate 9 - 10 cents
- Average per kilowatt hour savings for host of 10 - 25%
- Estimated annual savings to host of $2,500 - $7,000, as utility rates rise
- Fair market value for the host to purchase complete array starts around $200,000
Challenge #3: Finding a host

- This was the hardest one, since it’s most out of our control
- We’ve tried hard to go big for the first one - questionable decision
- One potential host dragged on negotiations for 18 months before backing out (!)
- Currently have Letter of Intent signed with second potential host, moving towards writing power purchase agreement (PPA)
Challenge #4: Funding to hire good people

- Took us 18 months to get funding from a single local funder
- Second local funder and one national funder took just six months
- So far, Cleveland Owns has raised ~$160,000 to fund this project
- Our new Energy Democracy Organizer, Craig, starts today - yay!!!
Closing: Additional resources

- People’s Solar Energy Fund
- Energy Democracy Project
- RE-AMP’s Energy Democracy working group
  - Convening in CLE in early May
- Sustainable Economies Law Center
- Institute for Local Self-Reliance
- Revolutionary Power by Shalanda Baker (Initiative for Energy Justice - book club!)
Discussion and Q&A
Thank you!

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