

**RFP: Solar Contractor for Solarize Wise program.**

**Project objective:**

Act as the primary solar installation contractor for a Solarize program in and around Wise County, Virginia.

**Timeframe:**

July - December 2017

**Desired result:**

Completed solar installations in greater Wise County area, with thorough documentation of materials, methods, costs, human resources, and best practices.

**Proposals Due:**

COB July 11, 2017

**Contact:**

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**Overview:**

The Solar Workgroup of Southwest Virginia; in collaboration with Appalachian Voices (AV), The Wise Norton Chamber of Commerce, People Inc, The Southwest Virginia Technology Council, The Wise County Cooperative Extension, and Mountain Empire Community College (MECC), is providing a community solarization service. **Solarize Wise** is a community program with the goal of making it simple and affordable to install small scale solar. Solarize Wise is open to homeowners, farmers, and small business owners in or near Wise County, Virginia. Through this program we seek to: 1) provide accessibility to a greater portion of the community by providing a more affordable way of attaining solar, particularly for low to moderate income individuals and families and 2) increase the awareness and educate our community about the local benefits of solar. Solarize Wise is intended as a vehicle for economic development and as such, the planning team will prioritize proposals that include the development of local workforce through this program.

**Timeline:**

June 23	RFP issued
July 11	Proposal deadline
July 18	Contractor selected
July 25 & Aug 1	Community info meetings
August - September	Site evaluations carried out. Follow up with each interested party.
September 1	Final number of participants established
September	Final contracts signed
October	Installations begin

*\*Dates subject to change.*

**General Expectations:**

- The contractor will be responsible for presenting information at 2 public meetings in July and August (see timeline above) to answer questions from interested parties and provide greater education to the community about solar.
- The contractor will be responsible for providing initial solar site assessments at no cost to interested parties. Following the completion of a solar assessment, the contractor is expected to follow up with property owners within one week regarding their viability for the project. The contractor must keep record of when and how each lead/interested party was initially contacted for follow up.
- For each viable program participant:
  - The contractor will be required to meet on-site with each customer to discuss the desired specifications and provide quotes and estimates.
  - The contractor must be accessible and responsive to communication during regular business hours.
  - The contractor will be responsible for drafting the contract for each solar system installed.
- In selecting a contractor, the planning team will give preference to installers that demonstrate a commitment to maximizing local economic benefits and employ or train local workforce. See Local Workforce section for more detail.

#### **Contractor Requirements:**

- Regular availability for planning discussions via phone or video conference.
- Commitment to work with both local and national banks and lenders and utilize other creative financing models to make solar accessible to low and moderate income families as is reasonable. In-house financing is an acceptable option.
- Create internship/apprenticeship opportunities for MECC students as a part of Solarize Wise.
- Exhibit understanding and support of the goals of the Solar Workgroup (see [www.SWVaSolar.org](http://www.SWVaSolar.org)).
- Keep thorough notes on each lead/installation including documentation of communications.
- Provide weekly status updates to AV Solarize Coordinator.
- Provide thorough documentation of materials, methods, costs, human resources, and best practices as requested during the course of the program and in a final report upon conclusion.

**Local Workforce:** Solarize Wise is part of a broader effort to jumpstart a regionally rooted solar industry cluster in far Southwest Virginia that maximizes local economic impact, job creation, and wealth creation and retention. As such, it is a high priority for the planning team to both develop *and* utilize local workforce to the greatest extent feasible through this program. To achieve this, we propose two concurrent strategies:

- 1) **Provide internship positions for Mountain Empire Community College (MECC) renewable energy students.** MECC currently has approximately 5-10 students enrolled in their renewable energy program that will be in need of internship/practicum hours to earn NABCEP certification during the Solarize Wise timeframe. We envision a partnership where some or all of those students are provided with an internship position

on Solarize Wise projects. The selected installer will supervise these interns in coordination with MECC faculty. It is our hope that the involvement of students would result in lower operating costs for a solar company. *For example, the curriculum of the solar program at the community college includes conducting site assessments. Where appropriate, students or interns could calculate exposure and gather other initial information at each site, the contractor could eliminate the cost of this activity in their budgeting and offer a more competitive price to consumers.*

- 2) **Work with established locally-based contractors who want to expand their scope of services into solar.** Currently there are few, if any, existing contractors in the area who are experienced in solar installation. This is because very few solar projects have been developed in the region to date. However if presented the opportunity, there is a capable workforce. We will give strong preference to applicants that employ or train some degree of local workforce to grow the number of qualified installers in the region.

MECC is an established partner and we are confident that the student internship program is actionable. The involvement of established local contractors is still a developing concept, and as of publication of this RFP there has been no firm commitment from any local contractors to partner on this project. While the ability to carry out this later vision is yet to be determined, we are very interested to understand the perspectives of established solar installers as it relates to this strategy to develop local workforce.

Proposals should respond to the company's ability and willingness to engage with these two workforce strategies and if applicable include a work plan for division of labor between the contractor's direct employees, subcontractors, and MECC students. Additionally, please indicate in your pricing how inclusion of these strategies would impact costs, if at all. We suggest a separate discussion of each. Finally, we are well aware that this is outside-of-the-box thinking. We welcome your comments or questions prior to proposal submission to clarify our goals and intent.

**Site leads, marketing, and community outreach:** The Solarize planning team has already done extensive outreach and community education promoting residential solar. The project coordinator will continue to lead community outreach efforts through the duration of Solarize Wise and will aid in direct communications with customers when needed. The Solarize Wise planning team manages a website and contact list of interested parties. Establishing additional web platforms and social media presence for the program is not required.

### **Proposals:**

Proposals should include a concise narrative that outlines how the installer will meet the above expectations and requirements. Please detail installer services, qualifications, and experience with solarize programs and the unique challenges of this particular program as it operates in a low-moderate income, rural area. Include plan and ability to provide timely customer service,

site assessments, program application submissions, and quality installation services while overseeing potential interns or subcontractors. Installers should have the ability to begin work immediately upon selection, including attending upcoming meetings and providing site assessments to participants currently registered. Additionally, proposals should:

- Describe the anticipated amount of time necessary for discussions with each customer including site visits and follow up.
- Include a plan for how the contractor intends to stay in touch with clients and the community if working remotely.
- Outline the process by which the Installer will handle leads deemed as sites not feasible for solar electric. Partnerships or referrals to firms or organizations that offer services such as energy efficiency or solar hot water are encouraged.
- Include a pricing matrix that clearly lays out **all-inclusive** per watt costs based on the scale of the program (see below) and addresses any price variation resulting from inclusion of MECC interns and/or local contractors. Travel expenses should be integrated into the per-watt cost.
  - Please include projections for discounts or estimated savings depending on the size of the Solarize Wise Program or level of participation.
  - E.g. 15 installed systems results in X% discount on equipment and materials, resulting in X savings to the client, or X kw installed through Solarize Wise results in X% discount on materials purchased bringing final cost of residential installation to \$X/watt compared to average national rate of \$X/watt.
- Include the expected timeline for completing installations once contracts are signed .
- Include plans for project evaluation and feedback from clients.

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