

SOLAR FOR SMALL BUSINESSES IN SALT LAKE CITY, UT

Project Summary

This project increased adoption of solar energy by small businesses in the Westside of Salt Lake City, a low and moderate income (LMI) neighborhood. The project team, led by Utah Clean Energy and the Salt Lake City Department of Sustainability, worked with six local businesses to support them with evaluation, implementation, and financial assistance to install rooftop solar and battery storage.

Key Partners

Utah Clean Energy is a nonprofit organization leading and accelerating the clean energy transition. This project grew out of an existing partnership with Salt Lake City on a Solar Energy Innovation Network grant from the National Renewable Energy Lab that helped identify commercial solar and energy storage barriers and best practices. Two different solar companies, Torus and Creative Energies, worked on the installations. Salt Lake City contributed staff time in planning and executing the program, including soliciting applications from businesses. Six local businesses received solar energy installations: M&K Automotive, Salt Lake Barber Company, Culture Coffee, Rico Brands, La Diana Market, and Mamachari Kombucha.



Photo Credit: Utah Clean Energy

Results

This project resulted in a total of 193 kW of solar installed at six businesses across five commercial building owners, along with battery storage installations totaling 107 kWh at two of the businesses. All of the businesses are minority-owned and serve minority customers and low-income communities. The businesses involved included a coffee shop, a barber shop, an automotive shop, a food manufacturer, a Hispanic grocery store, and a kombucha brewery, each fulfilling a unique role within their community.



Photo Credit: Utah Clean Energy



Photo Credit: Utah Clean Energy



Photo Credit: Utah Clean Energy

Community Impacts

These installations help to demonstrate the benefits of solar for cost savings, health, and resilience to communities. The energy cost savings for the small businesses ranges from \$70 to \$500 per month, and this project will offset 526 metric tons of CO₂ per year in total. The success stories related to this project will continue to resonate throughout the communities as the partners continue to amplify these projects through their networks.

Lessons Learned

Communication, solar expertise, and persistence are key to making these projects a reality. Even with funding, significant time is needed to educate business owners, to help them solicit and evaluate multiple complex solar bids, and to work through the inevitable barriers that arise. Each project was unique and had its own inherent challenges, making each particular success difficult to replicate. For example, with the Salt Lake Barber Company/Culture Coffee project, negotiations with the electric utility were required to cover the cost of an expensive transformer upgrade. This negotiation required collaborating with Utah Clean Energy and Salt Lake City. As a result of this experience, the partners allocated significant funds in the forthcoming Solar for All grant budget to go toward a Community Energy Liaison program which will provide communities with an energy expert to address barriers to working with utilities.

Influencing Change

The business owners expressed their commitment to participating in positive change for their community, whether in terms of clean electricity, reduced air pollution, or an overall sense of well-being and support. Although these projects have not been in place for long, the hope is that the experience of reduced utility costs and community resilience will make these businesses more operationally secure while contributing to pollution and greenhouse gas reductions and demonstrating the benefits of clean energy to their community.

KEY METRICS



Solar Installed - 193 kW across 6 sites



Battery Capacity Installed - 107 kWh across 2 sites



Electrical Cost Reduction - \$70 to \$500 per month per business



Carbon Offset - 526 metric tons per year



Jobs Impacted - Over 20 individuals worked on the La Diana Market installation, and teams of 9 to 17 individuals worked on the other four installations.

About USDN

Established in 2008, USDN empowers cities, counties and towns to tackle their most urgent sustainability and climate challenges. USDN brings local government sustainability practitioners together to learn, collaborate, and accelerate the work of local sustainability. By equipping them with the knowledge, resources, and partnerships they need to succeed, USDN helps advance change locally in member communities as well as across the field of practice. The aggregate impact and influence of our collective work makes an equitable, resilient, and sustainable society more attainable.

If you would like to connect to discuss and learn more about our vision and efforts in the years ahead, please reach out to support@usdn.org.