Nova Scotia's Department of Energy
Solar Industry Consultation

What We Heard

Introduction

The Nova Scotia Department of Energy hosted a two-day solar industry consultation session on March 6th, 2018 and March 7th, 2018. As a follow-up to the session, our team has produced a "What We Heard" document to summarize the discussions that we had during the break-out sessions. On the first day, the break-out sessions focused on how the net metering process could be improved, residential solar program options, and how to support a growing solar industry in Nova Scotia. The discussions on the second day were broader as we discussed options for a community scale solar program and mechanisms for servicing institutional customers. Sessions #3 and #4 generated many ideas and it was clear that more research should be done to explore the options available. Capturing the detail and depth of each of the discussions would be impossible in a short document. As a result, this "What We Heard" report is meant to summarize key ideas, themes, and messages that emerged from each of the sessions.

Session #1: Net Metering and Residential Installation

Interconnections and the Net Metering Process:

- **Streamline the net metering process:** There was recognition that the net metering process is important for ensuring safe interconnections and that the process generally works. However, there may be opportunities to make it more efficient. Some suggestions for improving the net-metering process included: having a single inspection, having the bi-directional meters installed on the last visit or pre-ordered, ensuring Nova Scotia Power had the capacity to handle an increase in the number of interconnection requests, and having an expedited process for experienced contractors.
- **Increase or eliminate the net metering cap:** The current 100 kW limit was regarded as too low. Increasing or eliminating the net metering cap was suggested through-out the consultation.

- **Implement time of day rate structures to make solar more economical.**
- **Share data:** Several break-out sessions indicated that they believed data collected should be aggregated and shared openly for consumers and industry.

Increasing Residential Adoption:

- **Reduce the upfront capital cost of solar:** Across break-out sessions, the upfront capital cost was identified as the biggest barrier to increasing residential solar adoption in Nova Scotia. The importance of making the investment cash flow neutral was highlighted several times. The primary suggestions for reducing the barrier were offering 1) a rebate and 2) low-interest financing. In some instances, offering both a rebate and low-interest financing was suggested. In the case of low interest financing participants pointed to existing Property Assessed Clean Energy (PACE) programs as a model that could be extended.
- **Create some certainty and predictability for the solar industry in Nova Scotia.** Feedback from the break-out sessions indicated that creating some stability in the solar industry through slow and strategic investment for controlled and sustained growth over a number of years would be important. One suggestion to provide this certainty was to provide a rebate that would steadily decline.

Session #2: Supporting a Growing Solar Industry in Nova Scotia

Through the break-out sessions a number of roles and resources were identified as important to support a growing solar industry in Nova Scotia. This section summarizes these roles and some of the key attributes and requirements that were discussed for each of them.

A central resource for industry: There is a need for an organization to take the lead to represent the solar industry in Nova Scotia. The organization would conduct and share research for industry, as well as, play an advocacy role.

Training for inspectors and installers: As mentioned in Session 1, there will be a need to increase the capacity of Nova Scotia Power to conduct net metering inspections. Several of the break-out groups also suggested there is a need for more consistency among inspections. Feedback indicated a preference for training that is 'hands on' to ensure a safe and reliable industry. Across break-out groups, it was suggested that for installers to gain access to funding they should meet specific training requirements.

Qualified Contractor Network: Following from training and certification, the development and management of a qualified contractor network was a natural extension. Several groups suggested that the qualified contractor network could be managed by the delivery agent of a rebate or grant program. Some key attributes of the network were suggested: system for handling complaints, an opportunity for the contractor to take corrective action, a disciplinary process whereby contractors could be removed.

Public Education:

- General engagement: Increasing the energy literacy of the broader public. A repeated suggestion included engaging elementary classes in energy workshops.
- Solar help desk: Having dedicated capacity to answer questions about solar energy and solar programs in Nova Scotia, direct to relevant resources, and explain the process of engaging in a residential solar PV project.
- Specific resources: A couple of documents were suggested across break-out groups as being beneficial for consumers: 1) A solar checklist for homeowners and 2) Clarification of the net metering process

Session #3: Community Shared Solar

During the break-out sessions different aspects of a potential community shared solar program were discussed (e.g. eligible owners and operators, participants, and locations etc). The general consensus was that a community shared solar program should be kept as broad as possible, allowing for many different owners, participants, and locations. There was also discussion on the need to develop a model for community shared solar projects that would enable low income households to participate. Some preference was expressed that community shared solar projects not be utility owned. Several groups suggested that a pilot project would be an ideal way to initially test the community shared solar model.

Session #4: Serving Institutional Customers

There was consensus that the limitations of Renewable to Retail mean that it is not the best mechanism to enable community shared solar projects or to service projects for institutional customers. The need to increase the limit on net metering was reiterated otherwise larger projects would be moved 'behind the meter'. Finally, across break-out groups there were suggestions for new targets for renewable energy beyond 2020 or a target for solar energy to provide a clear signal for industry moving forward.