

Distributed Generation: How It Works and How to Do It



Five ways to help our state build renewable energy



- Get an assessment from a solar vendor
- Use Rhode Island's programs to add a solar installation to your building
- Ask your city council or town manager about virtual net metering
- If you work for the city/town, a state agency, or a nonprofit, ask them too
- Ask the governor about her renewable energy plan for state facilities

Distributed generation also involves a renewable installation (solar or wind), but uses two meters: one meter measures the incoming electricity used by the customer, the other measures the outgoing electricity produced by the customer.

The customer pays the standard rate for the incoming electricity and receives a different, often higher, rate for the outgoing electricity from your renewable energy installation. The outgoing rate the customers receives pays for the cost of the

renewable system over time; this rate fixed is received for a period of 15 or twenty years. For residential distributed generation customers, the amount of electricity generated and the amount of electricity used are designed to balance over the course of the year.

Household action: The first step is calling a solar vendor—you can use the Office of Energy Resource's list. They will make a free assessment of your building's roof for its exposure to the sun, calculate how much electricity you could expect to generate in an average year, and show you—based on current programs—how quickly the initial cost of your installation will be paid back, and what its overall benefit to you will be.

In commercial installations, this balance is not required. Some facility owners may use most of the load of electricity they generate; others may have much smaller loads. In the latter instance, the renewable energy installation is a commercial venture serving the grid as a source of power generation. Distributed generation helps National Grid meet its obligation to provide Rhode Islanders electricity from renewable, non-carbon emitting energy resources.

Community action: The Office of Energy Resources launched SolarizeRI to increase adoption of small scale solar, organized at the municipal level—see <http://www.energy.ri.gov/renewable/solarize/> for more details. This is like buying in bulk: when a group of people get their energy this way, it brings down the unit cost of installing the systems. If your city/town is listed on their website, you can sign up for a solar energy evaluation for your home or business. If it's not, work with your neighbors to tell your mayor or town manager that there's strong interest in this program.