

# Solar Lab - Rural Routes to Climate Solutions (RR2CS)

## What is the issue?

Rural communities have the desire to develop community-owned renewable energy projects but lack the information, resources, capital, expertise and skills to do it on their own. Through Solar Lab, Rural Routes to Climate Solutions (RR2CS) provides leadership along with other partners to help communities gather what they need to fill this gap.

## What is the initiative?

The Solar Lab is a capacity-building initiative connecting rural communities to the information, resources, expert advice and skills to develop their community-owned renewable energy projects. The Solar Lab works with rural communities to build their own unique paths forward from the early stage of intending to develop a renewable energy project to an actual installation. The initiative is part of the Stettler Learning Centre's Rural Routes to Climate Solutions project (RR2CS).

## Why is it important for Alberta's energy future?

There are and have been many introductory "Solar PV 101" sessions across Alberta, but rural communities are usually left wondering what to do next. Not all rural communities have access to the same level of renewable energy expertise that urban centres like Calgary and Edmonton have for additional resources, community, perspectives, etc. despite there being many tools available. Furthermore, the political climate following the 2019 provincial election has resulted in an increased degree of uncertainty among Albertans as to the future of renewable energy development. To address this uncertainty and knowledge gap, RR2CS seeks out the appropriate expertise specific communities need, and creates connections, in order to move projects closer to an install.

## What is the challenge the initiative is facing that the Solar Lab can help address?

The Solar Lab has been running into some challenges that the participants at the Community Resilience Accelerator can help address.

Firstly, those who engage with the Solar Lab are more able to see the path forward for community-owned renewable energy projects that, indeed, bring it closer to completion. However, there is an opportunity to see the legitimacy (i.e. the robustness and resilience) of the path forward. For example, we connect solar champions to experts and teams in other rural communities who have completed projects through webinars and potentially even podcasts allowing for inspiration, knowledge transfer, and learning.

Secondly, the ability to really sense a community's needs for the Solar Lab and ascertain areas for it to support is quite difficult because of how unique the opportunities and challenges that occur both regionally and locally. For example, some communities are already applying for Municipal Climate Change Action Centre grant funding to implement a solar strategy where others are at the earliest stages trying to seek out others in the community who are interested.

Thirdly, to get clear on what the community REALLY needs requires a sense of trust and rapport that takes time to build, especially because there is often some hesitation to admit any vulnerabilities.

Lastly, there has been some loss of momentum and engagement due to funding gaps to move to the next level of support and/or project funding.

During the Community Resilience Accelerator the key question that RR2CS would like to address is **“How might we assess community's needs and show / demonstrate an even more legitimate path forward for community renewable energy projects?”**

## What has been tried in the past? What has worked? What has not worked?

Areas that have generated fruitful results:

- Partnership-building with other initiatives where Solar Lab can add additional value and vice versa (e.g. Energy Futures Roadshow, David Suzuki Foundation, QUEST)
- Building upon the relationships built in above partnership to continue to advance the work that has been started
- Solar Lab is known by a growing group of committed Albertans who they value being there ready to help people out, especially when funding comes in

Areas that have not worked:

- Several instances working with partners to create a longer collaboration pathway from Solar 101 session to community installation (with RR2CS at a mid-stage) hasn't worked as well as anticipated
- Reaching out to communities from scratch to get started because there has been no trust or rapport built