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Title: Unlocking the Solar Market: Expanding Access to Low- and Moderate-Income Communities

Abstract: Access to on-site solar electricity remains skewed toward middle class and affluent households and high-credit commercial entities. Nearly half of all rooftops cannot host solar due to insufficient roof space, lack of ownership or control over roof, poor roof orientation, or shading concerns. In order to expand solar access to underserved market segments, new and innovative business and financial models are required. The Department of Energy Solar Energy Technologies Office (SETO) has built local capacity to support solar projects, conducted analysis on low- and moderate-income (LMI) solar, and established a network of resources including templates, best practices, and coordinated technical assistance. This panel features speakers with a variety of perspectives to highlight the outcomes of the newly completed Solar in Your Community Challenge, share programs from other federal agencies working on low-income solar, and discuss the implications for solar accessibility and scalability in newly-designated, tax-favorable "Opportunity Zones".

The U.S. Department of Energy, Solar Office (SETO) ran a first-of-its-kind prize, the Solar in Your Community Challenge (SIYC), whose mission was to expand solar access to all Americans by addressing underserved segments such as LMI households, state, local, and tribal governments, and nonprofit organizations which are typically ineligible for the federal solar Income Tax Credit (ITC). The Challenge worked to spur the development of new, innovative, and scalable financial and business models over the course of 18 months. In addition, other federal low-income energy assistance programs have the potential to incorporate and support scaling solar energy to benefit low-income communities. Specifically, the Department of Health and Human Services' Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program and the Energy Department's state weatherization programs may include solar as an eligible efficiency measure to reduce energy burden. Lastly, "opportunity zones" have a potential role in catalyzing solar deployment in low-income communities. This panel will emphasize common features of these projects and programs, highlight scalable lessons learned from successful projects, and discuss future opportunities the federal government has to increase solar access by working with low-income communities.