WORKSHOP · TUE, OCT 13 · 2:30-3:30 PM

# Pennies to Power: How One Cent/kWh is Funding the Rural Energy Transition

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San Miguel Power Association, a small Colorado co-op serving nine politically different communities, funds local clean energy through a board-chartered Green Fund that sits outside its rates. Its nonprofit partner EcoAction Partners turns that money into solar, hydro, rebates, free heat pumps and workforce training.

## KEY TAKEAWAYS

1. **Fund clean energy outside the rate base.** A split co-op board backed the Green Fund unanimously once its spending no longer touched everyone's rates. Members who don't want to take part pay nothing extra.
2. **Small voluntary charges add up.** An opt-out bill round-up (no more than $11.88 a year) plus Totally Green, a 1 cent per kWh REC purchase that adds about $8 a month for an average home, feed the fund.
3. **Branding revived a stalled program.** Green Blocks (100 kWh for $1) stagnated. Relaunched as Totally Green, playing off a converted electric VW Beetle, sign-ups climbed again.
4. **Flexible money lets programs prove themselves.** Workforce training drew one or two people a year at first, too few to pitch grantors. Steady Green Fund support carried it until demand grew.
5. **Push your wholesale provider from the inside.** Rather than exit Tri-State, SMPA used its seat on the board. After about 10 years, the local generation cap rose from 5% to 20%.

## WHAT LOCAL OFFICIALS CAN DO

- ☐ **Identify your utility type first.** Co-ops answer to elected boards, municipal utilities to councils, and investor-owned utilities to the Public Utilities Commission.
- ☐ **Vote in co-op board elections** and encourage others to. Members directly elect the people who set direction.
- ☐ **Put a charter behind the fund** covering purpose, eligible uses, review and approval, and board oversight. SMPA's board gets quarterly updates.
- ☐ **Pick the format your politics will pass:** opt-in or opt-out, a per-kWh charge, a round-up, or fixed blocks.
- ☐ **Use the fund to leverage outside money.** $25,000 from the Green Fund unlocks $125,000 from Tri-State for member rebates.
- ☐ **Pair the utility with a trusted nonprofit** for outreach, impact reports and joint campaigns. A recent e-bike giveaway drew about 95 new sign-ups.
- ☐ **Tie local solar to low-income programs.** Weatherization clients were enrolled in a solar array that offsets 100% of their power.

## BY THE NUMBERS

**~5M kWh**
Yearly output of 4 fund-backed solar and hydro projects

**~500**
Households' use covered by those projects

**300+**
Homes weatherized through CARE, $1.25M+ in upgrades

**$150K**
Member rebates a year ($25K from the Green Fund)

**~8%**
Members in Totally Green, a little over 1,000

**<3%**
Members who have opted out of the round-up

## WATCH OUT FOR

- ! Subsidized local power purchase agreements usually need Green Fund help to match wholesale costs, and some circuits are so loaded with solar they can't take more.
- ! Pitching the fund as lowering rates has been a hard sell so far.

## RESOURCES

**SMPA Totally Green sign-up**
smpa.com/content/sign-totally-green

**EcoAction Partners**
ecoactionpartners.org

**Colorado Affordable Residential Energy (CARE)**
Statewide free weatherization program for households at 80% of area median income

**Tri-State**
SMPA's wholesale power co-op; co-funds member rebates

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