



# Civic Action

*A monthly update from the National Civic League*

August 2016

## Cities working to facilitate solar

*By Doug Linkhart, President of NCL*

Solar energy is on the rise! Cities across the U.S. are promoting solar to homeowners and businesses, both in the form of solar systems for individual users and group purchasing arrangements. As a result, more solar generating capacity was installed in the United States in 2015 than any year before, and solar energy made up one-third of all new generating capacity, according to The Solar Foundation.

Milwaukee, Wisconsin, is one of the more effective cities at engaging the community in the expansion of the solar energy. The [Milwaukee Shines](#) program



Milwaukee  
**SHINES**  
ecoCITY of  
MILWAUKEE

is working neighborhood by neighborhood to enlist homeowners in bulk purchasing arrangements to lower the cost of solar. The program is one of many being sponsored by the city's Environmental Collaboration Office, which also works with businesses on energy efficiency, helps neighborhoods develop pocket gardens on vacant lots and encourages alternative transportation modes.

Another way in which cities are encouraging solar energy is by cutting the "soft costs" involved with installing solar systems. The [Solsmart](#)



project, in which NCL is a partner, estimates that soft costs like regulatory compliance can add as much as \$2,500 to the cost of installing a solar system.

Solsmart encourages cities to reduce soft costs through a recognition program in which cities take a range of possible actions to make it easier to install solar. With a

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goal of 300 cities being recognized for taking these actions over the next three years, we've already received applications from 80 cities in less than 4 months! For more information on Solsmart, visit [www.solsmart.org](http://www.solsmart.org).

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## **Can Blogs Be a Home for Productive Civic Engagement?**

With the decline of print media over the past ten years, political blogs have become a more and more important source of news and opinion for millions of readers. Unfortunately, too many of these blogs are narrowly partisan, factually questionable or lacking in civility.

Would it be possible to use blogging as a way to promote civic engagement, productive discourse and community problem-solving? That's the question two government professors at University of North Carolina Chapel Hill sought to answer when the [Community Engagement Learning Exchange](#) website was created in December of 2014. "Our primary interest is to create a way for grassroots citizens, local government officials, and academics to contribute equally to ideas, experiences, assessments, and critiques of community engagement," writes UNC prof John B. Stephens in the summer issue of the National Civic Review. [To read the full article, click here.](#)

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## **Help Shape the 2017 All-America City Application**

For the 2017 All-America City Award, National Civic League will be partnering with the [Campaign for Grade-Level Reading](#) as a follow-up to our 2012 partnership.

NCL and the Campaign are dedicated to moving the needle on grade-level reading. The 2017 Award will recognize communities making measurable progress for low-income children on the key drivers of early reading success. The 2017 application is being co-developed by NCL, the Campaign and all interested communities.

We are eager to have your input on the draft application for the 2017 All-America City Award. Leave comments about the draft application on the [GLR Huddle](#) or email them to Susanne Bell at [susanne@smarterlearninggroup.com](mailto:susanne@smarterlearninggroup.com).

For more information on the 2017 Award visit: <http://gradelevelreading.net/aacaward>

In 2018 the All-America City Awards will return to the 'classic All-America City Award' and will be similar to the 2016 application. You may download the 2016 application for reference here: <http://www.nationalcivicleague.org/apply-for-the-2016-all->

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