

Study finds local voluntary programs are effective in promoting green energy

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Programs encouraging voluntary solar energy use at the local level are effective in spurring the adoption of solar power, a Florida State University researcher has found.

Tian Tang, an assistant professor in the Askew School of Public Administration and Policy, studied the effectiveness of voluntary environmental programs (VEPs) that encourage local governments to promote solar-friendly practices.

"We found that these VEPs are really effective in promoting these local [sustainability](#) actions," Tang said. "This helps show that solar adoption is heavily influenced by the local regulatory and policy environment."

Doctoral students Hunter Hill and Morgan Higman worked with Tang on the study, published in the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*. They focused primarily on the SolSmart Program, a VEP that encourages local governments to adopt best practices to promote solar installation.

SolSmart's incentives include national recognition and no-cost assistance to help local governments develop and adopt solar-friendly best practices and achieve gold, silver and bronze designations.

"The recognition as a 'SolSmart Community' is effective, and a lot of local governments and communities like this image and being able to brand themselves this way," Tang said. "It's a [marketing tool](#) to say, 'Our community is sustainable' and another way to attract people and businesses into these communities."

Tang said those incentives are working, as the study showed local government participation in SolSmart is associated with an increased solar installed capacity of 18% to 19% per month.

The voluntary aspect of VEPs factors strongly in their success, Tang said.

"The mandatory approach to [clean energy](#) and environmental issues may

not be welcome in a lot of places and may not be passed in a lot of places," she said. "That's why providing a voluntary program that local governments can opt in according to their needs makes sense."

Tang added: "Flexibility for the implementation is another key factor and allows basic actions which help [local governments](#) and communities to start small with basic things, to pursue them and then to pursue a higher designation."

More information: Xue Gao et al, Encouraging voluntary government action via a solar-friendly designation program to promote solar energy in the United States, *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* (2022). [DOI: 10.1073/pnas.2106201119](https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.2106201119)

Provided by Florida State University

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