

HiQ Solar Case Study

Cooperative Community Energy, San Rafael, California



There are a number of reasons California is home to roughly half of the United States' solar electric industry, but four stand out: ample sunshine, high utility electricity rates, very strong state and local incentives, and an environmentally progressive mindset behind energy policy. With its leading position in clean energy, California is a natural incubator for innovative solar business models as well as technologies.

One of them is Cooperative Community Energy in San Rafael, a solar co-op serving residential, commercial and utility customers. Its mission: provide members with reasonably-priced, high quality equipment as well as the expertise to install and use it. Members enjoy discounts on equipment as well as access to design services and software, site evaluation, and qualified installers, as well as share in CCEnergy's profits when available.

Founder Dan Pellegrini explains his reason for starting such an organization. "I wanted to 'go solar' myself in 2001 so did what everyone did back then: I checked with the Yellow Pages under 'solar' and contacted all six businesses listed there — only two called me back, and one turned out to not be real. I figured there had to be a better way, and after attending an energy fair right after that and meeting up with like-minded people, we formed a solar cooperative and have been growing ever since."

CCEnergy has projects all over the state, and maintains a warehouse to ensure support for its various customers, which, along with homeowners, includes community solar projects, schools, fire stations, ranches and farms, urban development projects, and businesses of all sizes. The co-op has a network of pre-qualified installation contractors, selected for their ability to install correctly and according to code, and follow best practices.



The company became acquainted with HiQ Solar while looking for a power-conversion solution for a customer's next project following a particularly challenging installation at their previous one. The customer, Good Earth Natural Foods, had a building that could not structurally support large, heavy centralized commercial inverters, requiring the CCEnergy team to dig and create a structure at ground level in the parking lot, and run trenching back to the building for underground cables, adding a lot of expense and effort. The next Good Earth store project in Mill Valley was slated for a location where even that was not possible, based on the moisture and ground conditions at the site. Clearly CCEnergy needed to use a different approach.

Turning to HiQ Solar's TruString inverter provided the solution, in multiple small, lightweight and dispersed rooftop units that the building could easily support along with the solar array.

As Dan Pellegrini notes, "the advantages are considerable. With our last commercial design if an inverter goes out half the system goes with it, but with HiQ should that happen we're down just 8kW and not 100kW! But even more important is the reduced likelihood of any problems - HiQ's diagnostics are impressive. And the price is hard to beat. We see this technology as the wave of the solar future."

CCEnergy plans on using HiQ in a number of diverse projects for these reasons, from solar carports up to a 15MW solar farm project they are presently planning with a utility. With "improving product and service quality while reducing costs" listed as two leading objectives for a cooperative business, the HiQ approach is now a proven means for CCEnergy to achieve those goals with their stakeholders.

