

Getting copies hot off the press, Washington had *The American Crisis* read aloud to his troops before crossing the Delaware River to attack Trenton, New Jersey, which we'll discuss in Chapter 9. The inspiration that Paine provided helped give the Americans the motivation to take a big risk in facing a formidable foe and, ultimately, triumph both at Trenton and in their whole long war for independence from Britain.

For today's solar patriot, Paine's little pamphlets with the big impact show the power of education to change minds and mobilize citizens for action.

Seven

REFERRALS—HELP OTHERS
TO GO SOLAR AT HOME

*It takes time to persuade men to do
even what is for their own good.*

—THOMAS JEFFERSON

To start with a more recent quote, Ronald Reagan said that “All great change in America begins at the dinner table.” The easiest way to help spread solar is to encourage your neighbors and your family and friends to go solar at their own homes. It may also be the most rewarding for you—financially.

As we saw earlier, research shows that solar spreads more quickly once there's at least one solar installation in a neighborhood. Joining a solar installer's referral program

can be an effective way for you to help spread solar power quickly to rooftops in your neighborhood and beyond.

Solar Companies Love Referrals

Referrals are valuable sales leads for solar companies. For some solar installers, referrals from existing customers are their top source of new business. Below you'll find some examples of referral programs from solar installers around the country, with details accurate as of mid-2017. If you are interested in sending referrals to any of the companies mentioned or any other solar installer, you should check with the company for current information about their referral programs.

Baker Electric Solar in San Diego gets 63 percent of their new customers from referrals. Aside from having lots of glowing reviews from satisfied customers online, Baker Electric may also get lots of referrals because they don't just sit around hoping that their customers will send people to the company and then wait for the referrals to come in. Instead, Baker Electric has established an active customer referral program.

The program starts by offering advice and encouragement for customers to talk to their friends about solar power. "If you've experienced the benefits of solar, don't keep them to yourself!" the company's referral webpage says.

Share with your friends the many benefits of going solar. Tell them about the money and headaches you've saved by becoming your own energy provider. Let them know how it feels to take control of your energy needs and secure a lifestyle for your family that's independent from utility companies. Describe your experience with our consultants, engineers, and technicians; our 10-step installation process; and our customer service. And by all means, please convey the important fact that by switching to solar, you're doing your part to help eliminate harmful greenhouse gases in your community.

Then, Baker Electric offers a referral bonus. Payments to existing customers who send referrals to the company that sign up for solar range from a few hundred dollars for the first referral to a maximum of a thousand dollars for subsequent referrals.

Throw a Solar Party, Earn Referral Fees

Many solar installation companies offer a bonus for referrals. The amount of the bonus typically ranges from \$200 to \$700, though it can be as high as \$1,500 or even more.

Most referral programs only make bonus payments when a potential customer who was referred by someone

else signs up for solar with the company. But Clean Solar in Northern California goes further to encourage people to send them referrals. When a referral signs up for a free solar quote, the company gives the person who sent the referral a \$25 gift. After that, they pay \$500 for a closed deal.

To help you help them, most solar companies can offer you brochures and other printed sales materials. Companies can even consult with you on the best ways to talk about solar to prospective buyers.

For example, Northeast Solar in Massachusetts offers an attractively designed fact sheet that their customers can give out to folks they know who are interested in going solar. The fact sheet does much of the talking, with brief but helpful information on how solar can save homeowners money, how it helps the environment, how long solar panels last, and what warranties are available in case something needs to be fixed.

Some solar installation companies will even help you throw an event to introduce your friends and family to solar power.

For example, SunCraft Solar, also located in San Diego, will create a customized email text for a customer to send out to potential referrals. The email can serve as a stand-alone sales message or it can be an invitation to an event to learn more about solar power and hear the company's sales pitch. Then, SunCraft can help you set up and hold

the event, whether at your home, your workplace, or even your church.

And SunCraft doesn't just send a rep to speak to the group about the benefits of solar, as many solar companies will. This company goes above and beyond by helping you throw your party in style: they provide wine and cheese for a house party or even hot dogs and soda for a neighborhood BBQ.

It will be easiest and most effective for you to refer people to the company that installed your solar panels if you are happy with their work and if they offer a referral program. In case your solar company doesn't offer a referral program, other solar installers in your area may. These can include both local installers and large national companies.

Once you get solar yourself, it's fun to show it off to your neighbors and other people you know. Earning referral payments from a solar company is a nice bonus. But the biggest satisfaction may be helping other people to do what you've already done and helping give them clean energy independence while spreading solar around your area. The story of one homeowner with solar will illustrate this well.

Case Study: The Easy Way to Get Neighbors into Solar

Paul Triolo lives in the Maryland suburbs of Washington, DC, where he commutes to his job as a consultant on

international cybersecurity. In early 2017, Paul and his wife signed up for a solar cooperative program in Montgomery County which gave them a 15 percent discount on a solar installation.

The solar coop was run by SUN Maryland, an organization founded by Anya Schoolman, the solar activist with Solar United Neighbors based in Washington, DC who we met in Chapter 3. The Maryland group helped put local homeowners together to qualify for a group discount on solar installations.

“A retired couple went solar first and they were an inspiration for us,” Paul told me. “Our street now has four solar installations on the block, and in our neighborhood, there are half a dozen, compared to none a couple years ago. The concept of the consortium is catching on, when you can cut the cost. It seems like a good model.”

The consortium got its price break because its members all agreed to get solar from the same local company, Solar Energy World. As a result, the company installed a total of 8.6 kilowatts of solar panels on the roof of the house that Paul and his wife own. The company even paid a referral bonus to another couple who had referred the Triolos a couple years earlier.

The Triolos’ solar system was designed to offset 90 percent of the couple’s electricity usage over the course of a year. They plan to have Tesla PowerWall batteries

installed in the future, when the price comes down, so that they don’t have to use any dirty electricity from the grid.

“I still have a problem burning any carbon. I’d rather just be full electric. That’s why solar is the best solution all the way round,” Paul told me.

In the meantime, their Chevy Bolt electric car acts as a mobile battery backup for their solar panels.

Just as the installer, Solar Energy World, paid the other couple when the Triolos went solar, so now the company pays the Triolos \$500 for their own signed referrals. Even before their solar system was a month old, Paul and his wife started spreading the word to neighbors and friends. As a result, they quickly earned one referral commission payment and had another two couples lined up who would probably go solar as well.

They also planned to host an open house to show off their solar panels and their electric car and talk about energy efficiency upgrades that had helped make their place essentially a zero-energy house.

Paul put a lot of thought and planning into his investments in solar power and energy independence, so he enjoys sharing them with people he knows. He likes being a leader in clean technology and he enjoys pioneering new technology. That’s why he might not wait until batteries are much cheaper before he installs his own energy storage system at home.

“You make your decision to buy based on the whole package, the future of the planet, what kind of system you’re leaving for whoever buys the house.”



FROM THE REVOLUTION: CONTINENTAL ARMY

The American farmers who fought at Lexington and Concord and other early battles of the Revolution were not an organized army. Instead, they were recruits from local militia companies, groups of citizens who trained in their free time to defend their villages and farms from attacks by Native Americans. After the local militias fought the British at Lexington and Concord, they joined other militia units from around New England to lay siege to the British garrison in Boston.

At that time, the Second Continental Congress meeting in Philadelphia was still a year away from declaring independence. Some state representatives still wanted to make peace with Britain. But with more than 17,000 militiamen besieging British-occupied Boston, Congress realized that, whether they wanted it or not, they now had an army on their hands that was already fighting the British.

At the request of delegates from New England, on June 14, 1775, Congress adopted the militia units besieging Boston, designating them the Continental Army. On the next day, Congress unanimously voted to appoint George Washington to command the new American army.

Much like the state militias of Massachusetts, Connecticut, Rhode Island, and New Hampshire that formed the core of Washington’s young army, today’s homeowners fighting for solar rights are usually found working with groups

in their own states, from California and Nevada to Florida and New York. And just as during the American Revolution, militia units became stronger when they united with those from other states in the Continental Army, so today, solar homeowners can become much more effective if they unite across states and across party lines.

A modern-day, peaceful Continental Army of solar patriots could go beyond standing up for net metering or against fixed charges in their own state. Such a national alliance of solar patriots could push for much more powerful policies on the national level.

Solar advocacy groups including Vote Solar, Solar United Neighbors, and others listed in Appendix D, bring together solar advocates across states to exchange ideas and share resources to make lobbying in separate states more effective. In a broader approach, Citizens' Climate Lobby leapfrogs past state policy altogether to push for carbon-fee-and-dividend at the federal level, the "killer app" for solar discussed later, in Chapter 10.

Thanks to the rights that the Continental Army won for Americans by force of arms nearly two and a half centuries ago, today's continent-wide army of solar patriots can fight for solar rights using peaceful means. While Washington's army defeated the superior British forces with muskets and rifles, swords and bayonets, and well-placed artillery pieces, so today's army of solar patriots can defeat the powerful forces of monopoly utilities and coal and oil barons with the peaceful weapons of education, referrals, and advocacy.

Eight

ADVOCACY—SUPPORT BETTER
PUBLIC POLICY FOR SOLAR

*Those who expect to reap the blessings
of freedom must, like men, undergo
the fatigue of supporting it.*

—THOMAS PAINE

Now we come to the part of this book that's most oriented towards the government.

In the last couple of chapters, we talked about ways that solar homeowners could help spread solar by talking to their friends, family, neighbors, and others they already know. Here, we're going to talk about how to talk to public officials about rooftop solar.