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Solar-powered resiliency the focus of a new \$500,000 climate initiative to reach 800 Newark high school students with hands-on training

NEWARK, N.J. — (April 3, 2023) — The City of Newark’s Office of Sustainability, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), and Solar One, a green energy nonprofit, announced a new, two-year \$500,000 initiative today that combines classroom, career, and community learning about climate, and solar charging systems, with solutions for Newark communities most affected by severe storms.

The Newark Resilient Solar Initiative, funded by NOAA’s [Environmental Literacy Program](#), focuses on youth-led community education and the construction and deployment of small-scale solar power generation and storage systems to provide supplemental power to local residents when the electrical grid is down.

In recent years, thousands of Essex County homes, schools, and businesses confronted major power outages and faced costly property damage following severe flooding caused by historic cyclones like Superstorm Sandy, Hurricanes Ida and Irene, and Tropical Storm Isaias.

“The damage Newark has withstood from four severe weather incidents in the last 10 years is proof enough that we need to be on the cutting edge of climate change mitigation and proactive protective measures,” **said City of Newark Mayor Ras J. Baraka**. “This initiative puts the city’s future right into the hands of our youth, providing them with environmental literacy and the skills to build sustainability not only into their neighborhoods, but also into a solid career at the vanguard of the new green economy.”

The initiative began in October 2022 with hands-on three-week training sessions in climate literacy and basic solar installation at three Newark public high schools: Shabazz, Barringer, and Technology. It is slated to reach 800 students and provide professional development training for nine Newark Public School teachers during the 24-month grant.

Solar One is also partnering with [Dimension Renewable Energy](#) to support the program and provide participating students with additional opportunities for internships in the solar industry connected with the NJ Board of Public Utilities Community Solar program.

A Resilient Communities Coordinator - Newark neighborhood leader and volunteer **Audris B. Torres** - was hired March 1 to work within the **Newark Office of Sustainability** to implement the initiative's goals. Torres will convene an advisory committee of local stakeholders - community members, CBO partners, and environmental justice leaders - who will guide project activities including the siting locations for the solar charging systems.

The Newark Resilient Solar Initiative aims to:

- Provide professional green energy learning opportunities for high school students and educators from Newark Public Schools
- Provide interaction with local decision-makers and guidance from educators to gain exposure on current and future careers in environmental sectors
- Provide opportunities for students to participate in a paid internship program

"The training responds to students' need for high-quality technical and work-based learning opportunities in high schools," said **Stephen Levin, CEO of Solar One and a former New York City Councilmember**. "We're focusing our community education efforts around climate resilience for those in low-income, predominantly Black and Latino communities in Newark that are highly vulnerable to flooding," he said.

The charging systems are called resilient solar chargers and include "solar plus battery" storage. Each resilient system is set to be unveiled at a series of community engagement events that will feature NOAA information and materials on topics related to weather and emergency preparedness. The systems will be available at community gardens, recreation centers, and other publicly accessible buildings.

"We are thrilled to join forces with Solar One and the Newark Office of Sustainability to support this project. We look forward to the transformative impact it will have on people's lives. Projects like this help fulfill NOAA's commitment to scientific excellence, community service, and environmental stewardship," said **Louisa Koch, NOAA Director of Education**.

"Communities such as Newark have felt first-hand the consequences of the climate crisis and flooding related to recent historic storms, which have impacted both residents and businesses. This initiative is an effective way to build more sustainable cities while also preparing young people for careers in the green economy," said **U.S. Sen. Bob Menendez**. "By empowering and educating our youth in climate literacy and solar technologies, we will not only be preparing for and preventing future storm-related disruptions, but will also be delivering environmental justice to communities most significantly affected by climate change."

"The climate crisis threatens the health and safety of people in Newark, and it is this city's young people who will lead us to a cleaner, more sustainable, and more resilient future," said **U.S. Sen. Cory Booker**. "This effort will familiarize students with climate-resilient technologies, provide valuable career opportunities, and help them engage with their community to plan and implement local resilience goals."

"I am proud to hear that Newark is on the cutting edge of solar and other renewable energy initiatives, especially ones that involve our students," said **U.S. Rep. Donald M. Payne, Jr.** "Climate change continues to cause more severe storms that increase power outages across Newark and northeastern New Jersey. I have introduced a bill in Congress to improve how the federal government responds to natural disasters and these solar power generation and storage systems are a great example of that improvement. We need to create solutions to the problems of climate change immediately. This grant will help create the solutions necessary to protect more homes and businesses from the weather-related power outages in the future," he said.

Founded in 2004, [Solar One's work](#) has been lauded by the U.S. Department of Energy, Citi Foundation's Community Progress Makers, and United Laboratories (UL) among others, for excellence in engaging diverse, and underrepresented student groups about the environment through Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM).

Despite the pandemic challenges in 2020 and 2021, Solar One's **Green Design Lab** educators reached more than 5,000 students in New York City and Newark with in-person education in 120 different schools, teaching more than 500 teachers how to deliver our science-based environmental curriculum in their own classrooms.

"NOAA, Solar One, and the City are hopeful the successful Newark Initiative will serve as a blueprint for other urban cities seeking best practices to utilize resilient solar systems for community education and green career training," **Levin said.**

Visit solar1.org for more information or contact **Alonza Robertson, Solar One Communications Manager, alonza@solar1.org, 212.920.1679 mobile; or Crystal Rosa, Communications Director, Office of the Mayor of Newark, N.J., rosac@ci.newark.nj.us, 973.733.8004 office.**