



**COLORADO**  
Energy Office



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Office of Gov. John Hickenlooper

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## **Colorado Energy Office, Grid Alternatives announce Empire Electric Association community solar project**

### ***The first of several projects designed for low-income customers breaks ground***

DENVER – Apr. 12, 2016 – The Colorado Energy Office (CEO), GRID Alternatives (GRID) and Empire Electric Association (Empire) announce the development of a community solar array that will lower the electric bills of qualified low-income residents in their service territory. The project is part of a statewide initiative designed to demonstrate how the community solar model can be optimized to reduce energy costs for utilities' highest need customers - those who spend more than 4 percent of income on utility bills.

“This groundbreaking in Cortez marks the first of many that will follow in the months ahead. Through these partnerships we are simultaneously achieving two objectives: mitigating energy burden for the most financially strapped households and assisting electric utilities to achieve renewable energy goals,” said Colorado Energy Office Director Jeff Ackermann.

GRID received a \$1.2 million CEO grant in August 2015 to partner with utilities to implement low-income community solar. Earlier this year, CEO and GRID announced project partners, each of which is piloting a slight variation on the low-income community solar model to address the unique needs of rural utility service areas and their customers. The projects selected are both affordable and scalable for utility partners, and offer great potential to expand across the state.

“Empire Electric will be the first demonstration project to come online, but GRID and other utility partners are already seeing a swell of incoming inquiries from the community and families who want to participate in the program,” GRID Executive Director Chuck Watkins. “We’re already realizing a reputation of impact, integrity and effectiveness – partners, communities and people across Colorado are paying attention to what the Colorado Energy Office and GRID are offering.”

Empire general manager, Josh Dellinger, said Empire is interested in expanding renewable energy access with this impactful and innovative model:

“As a member-owned cooperative, Empire is concerned about the best interests of our members. We see this low-income community solar project as an opportunity to positively impact the communities we serve. Empire is providing a hand-up rather than a hand-out to the subscribers – everyone benefitting will contribute through sweat equity and contribute financially to the project through a monthly energy payment.”

On April 15 and 16 in Cortez, GRID’s programmatic barn-raising model will engage members of the community to come together to install the 21 kW solar array. Participants will include employees from the utility, the subscribers benefitting, local elected officials, schools and others

to install 70 solar panels that will help save up to 10 qualified families approximately \$500 per year.

GRID also is offering practical hands-on job training and experience for students from a tribal school in New Mexico - Navajo Technical University (NTU) – that offers an Energy Systems Associates Degree and courses on photovoltaic system design and installation. The students will have an opportunity to work and learn on an actual solar project and are traveling 150 miles to Cortez to access this invaluable field experience.

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#### **About Colorado Energy Office**

The Colorado Energy Office works to improve the effective use of all of Colorado's energy resources and the efficient consumption of energy in all economic sectors that benefit the economic and environmental health of the state. Visit the website at [www.colorado.gov/energy](http://www.colorado.gov/energy).

#### **About GRID Alternatives**

GRID Alternatives is America's largest nonprofit solar installer bringing clean energy technology and job training to low-income families and underserved communities through a network of community partners, volunteers, and philanthropic supporters. For more information, visit [www.gridalternatives.org](http://www.gridalternatives.org)

#### **About Empire Electric Association**

Empire Electric Association, Inc., is a member-owned nonprofit rural electric cooperative serving consumers in southwest Colorado and southeast Utah since 1939, providing energy and energy-related services to Cortez, Dolores, Mancos, Dove Creek, Towaoc and Monticello. <http://www.eea.coop/>