

AUGUST 2024

REGIONAL SUMMARIES

US Community-Based Organizations and Their Relationship to Solar Energy Development



PREPARED FOR THE CLEAN ENERGY STATES ALLIANCE





US Community-Based Organizations and Their Relationship to Solar Energy Development: Regional Summaries

AUGUST 2024

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ABOUT THIS REPORT

This report, prepared by the Clean Energy States Alliance (CESA), presents a summary of the regional findings in a larger report titled *US Community-Based Organizations and Their Relationship to Solar Energy Development*. That report was based on a survey of community-based organizations (CBOs) that was carried out by a team of researchers from MIT, led by Professor Janelle Knox-Hayes.

The full report and these summaries were produced for the Solar with Justice project. Under this project, CESA and MIT are working with state and nonprofit partners to understand and improve how state energy agencies and community-based organizations collaborate on solar. Learn more at: <https://www.cesa.org/projects/solar-with-justice>.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This report is based upon work supported by the U.S. Department of Energy's Office of Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy (EERE) under the Solar Energy Technologies Office (SETO) Award Number DE-EE0009360.



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REGIONAL SUMMARIES

Introduction

This report summarizes the regional findings from a national survey of Community-Based Organizations (CBOs) engaged with or interested in solar development. CBOs are organizations that work at the local level to provide services to communities that improve their health and well-being. The summaries are broken down by four regions—Midwest, Northeast, Southeast, and West to capture how CBOs in different regions prioritize solar activities differently. Results from the Southwest are not detailed due to insufficient survey responses from that region.

To capture the diversity and breadth of solar work conducted by CBOs in low-to-moderate-income (LMI) communities, a team of researchers from MIT led by Professor Janelle Knox-Hayes prepared and completed a nationwide survey of CBOs. Its questions were based on learnings from 41 interviews previously conducted with CBOs across the United States, as well as from a national workshop and focus-group discussions with CBOs and state energy agency representatives.

The Clean Energy States Alliance (CESA) compiled a national database of CBOs that work on solar and renewable energy. Using this database as a starting point, the survey was sent to 563 participants with a received rate of 134 fully completed responses, and 27 partial but usable responses received between October 2022 and February 2023.

Midwest Community-Based Organizations and Their Relationship to Solar Energy Development: A Summary of Findings

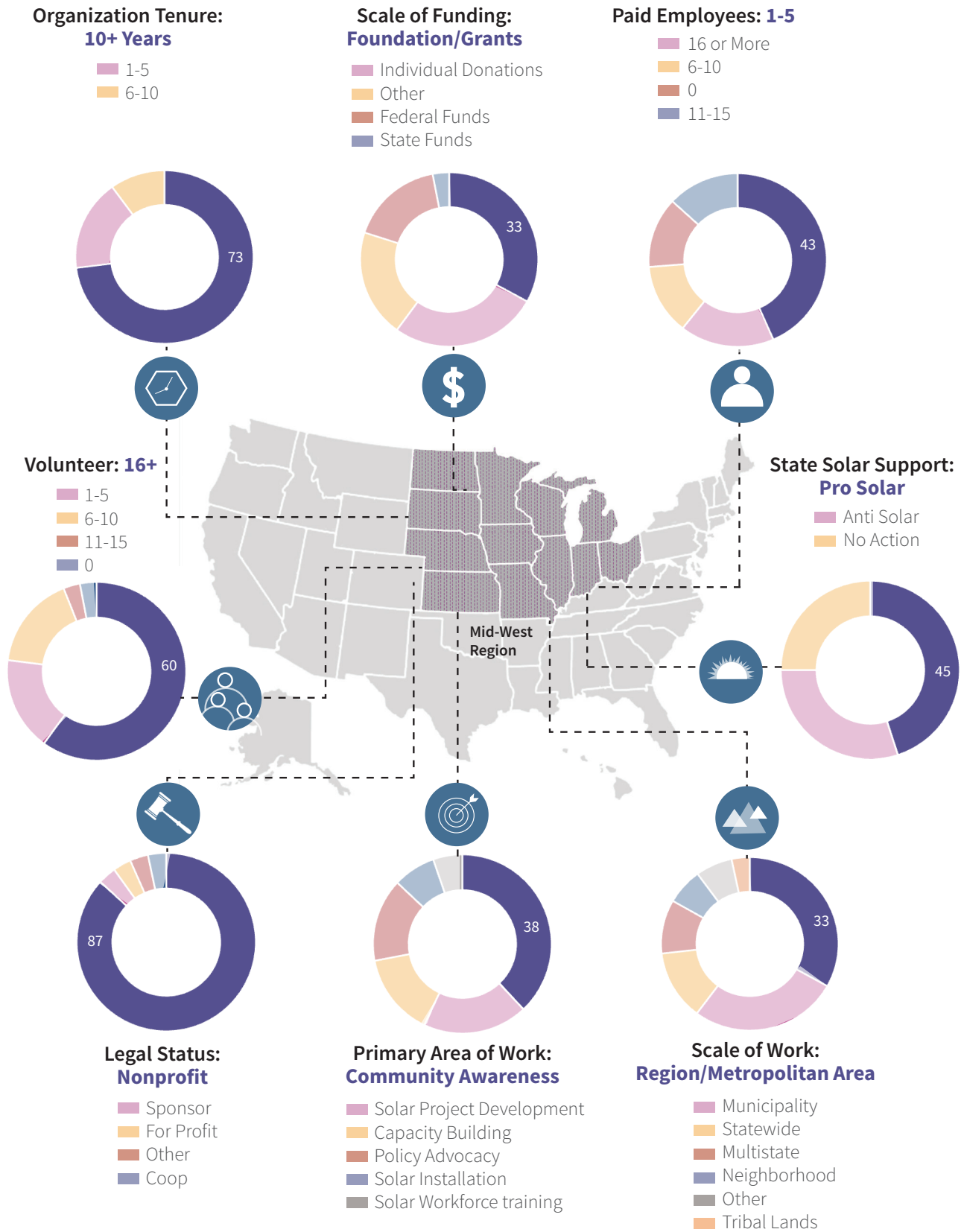
This regional summary for the Midwest presents the findings from a national survey of Community-Based Organizations (CBOs). This overview summarizes the 35 responses from the Midwest region and describes characteristics of CBOs that do work related to solar, including their size, funding, and focuses of their work. The following table includes the most common responses from CBOs in this region.

Summary of Survey Responses from Midwest CBOs	
Organization Tenure	72% of CBOs have tenure >10 years
Scale of Work	Mainly work at the regional/metropolitan or municipal levels
Primary Area of Work	Primary area of work is community awareness (38%), followed by a relatively equal split among solar project development, policy advocacy, and capacity building
Legal Status	87% are nonprofits
Paid Employees	45% have 1-5 employees;14% have no employees
Scale of Funding	Wide split on where they get funding, with the largest group getting most funding from foundation grants (33%), and individual donations being the next most common answer
Volunteers	Most (60%) have more than 16 volunteers
Perceived level of State Solar Support	Nearly half of CBOs believe their state government is pro-solar, with the remaining respondents split between saying the government is anti-solar and not voicing an opinion

The research team used factor analysis to generate variables corresponding to a CBO respondent’s knowledge and focus on eight factors: Energy Independence Awareness, Green Finance Awareness, Communication for Solar Awareness, Degree of Community Solar Awareness, Motivation: Community Energy Sovereignty, Degree of CBO Involvement in Communities Served, Workforce Installation Scale, and Depth of Solar Work.

The Midwest scored relatively low on Energy Independence Awareness, Green Finance Awareness, and Communication for Solar Awareness. This region had the highest score for Community Energy Sovereignty as a CBO motivation, and Degree of CBO Involvement in Communities Served. These results suggest that CBOs in this region are less focused on and familiar with green finance options and energy independence as an issue. Compared to other regions, CBOs here focus less on communication strategies and capacity to raise awareness for residential solar programs. On the other hand, CBOs in the Midwest tend to be more motivated by community empowerment, economic opportunity, and environmental justice, and are highly involved in the communities they serve.

Figure 1: Regional Analysis—Midwest



Northeast Community-Based Organizations and Their Relationship to Solar Energy Development: A Summary of Findings

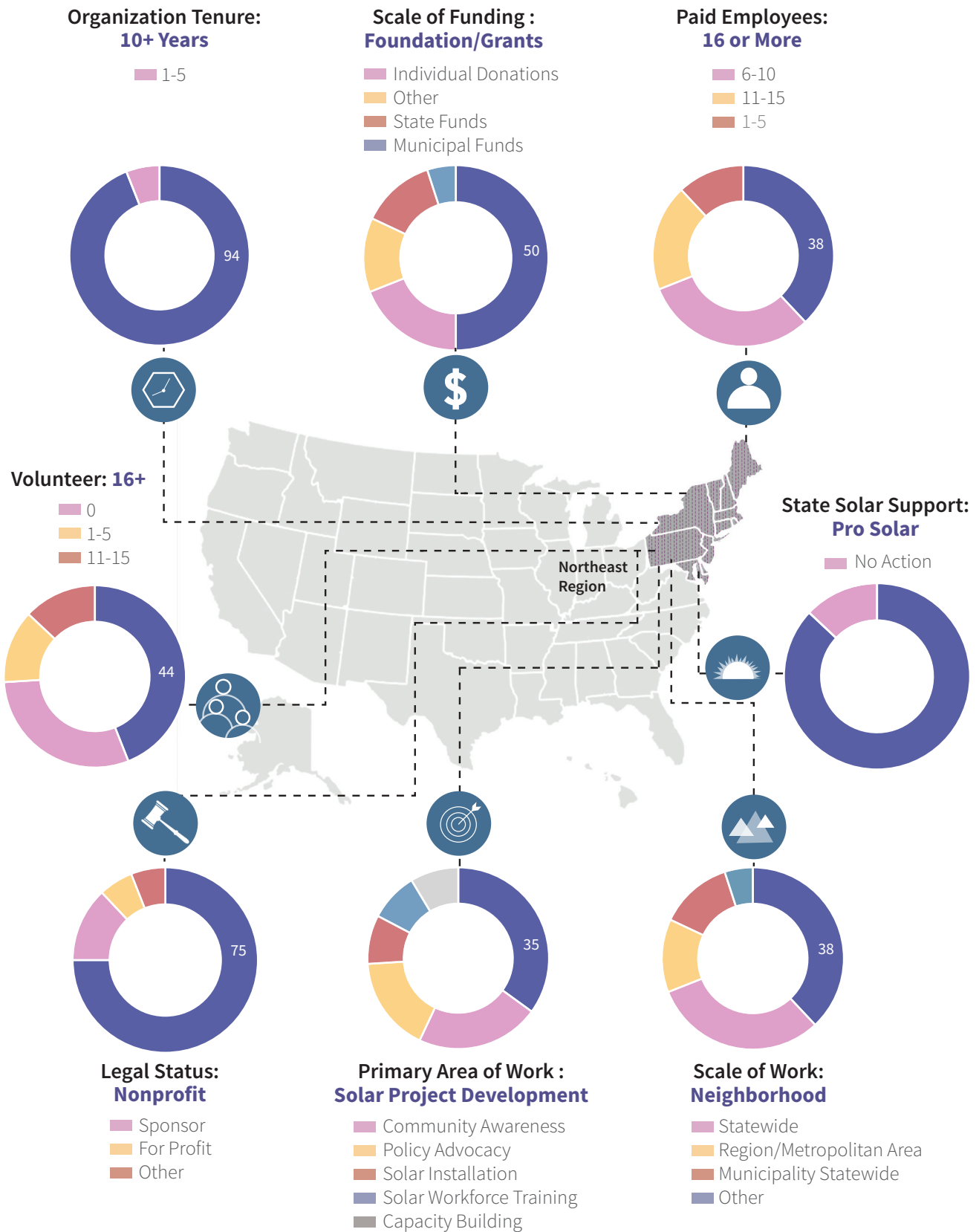
This regional summary for the Northeast presents the findings from a national survey of Community-Based Organizations (CBOs). This overview summarizes the 39 responses from the Northeast region and describes characteristics of CBOs that do work related to solar, including their size, funding, and focuses of their work. The following table includes the most common responses from CBOs in this region.

Summary of Survey Responses from Northeast CBOs	
Organization Tenure	94% have tenure >10 years
Scale of Work	The work of the vast majority of CBOs focuses on the neighborhood or municipality levels
Primary Area of Work	Solar project development is the primary area of work for 35%, followed by community awareness then policy advocacy.
Legal Status	75% are nonprofits
Paid Employees	Nearly 90% have at least 6 employees, including 38% with at least 16 employees
Scale of Funding	Half get the most funding from foundation grants, with individual donations being the next most common answer
Volunteers	Most have more than 11 volunteers, including 44% with more than 16 volunteers
Perceived level of State Solar Support	87% believe that their state government supports solar

The research team used factor analysis to generate variables corresponding to a CBO respondent's knowledge and focus on eight factors: Energy Independence Awareness, Green Finance Awareness, Communication for Solar Awareness, Degree of Community Solar Awareness, Motivation: Community Energy Sovereignty, Degree of CBO Involvement in Communities Served, Workforce Installation Scale, and Depth of Solar Work.

Community-based organizations in the Northeast are highly focused on energy independence, green finance, and community solar awareness, especially compared to CBOs in other regions. Energy Independence is a variable the research team created that brings together CBO familiarity with solar tax credits, low-income assistance programs, energy burden, and familiarity with energy independence, along with access to resilience hubs. CBOs are somewhat involved and located in the communities they serve, and the communities served in this region are perceived to be very aware of and understand the benefits of solar energy. Organizations in the Northeast are more focused on workforce training and solar installation than most other regions, and specifically work on solar installation projects.

Figure 2: Regional Analysis—Northeast



Southeast Community-Based Organizations and Their Relationship to Solar Energy Development: A Summary of Findings

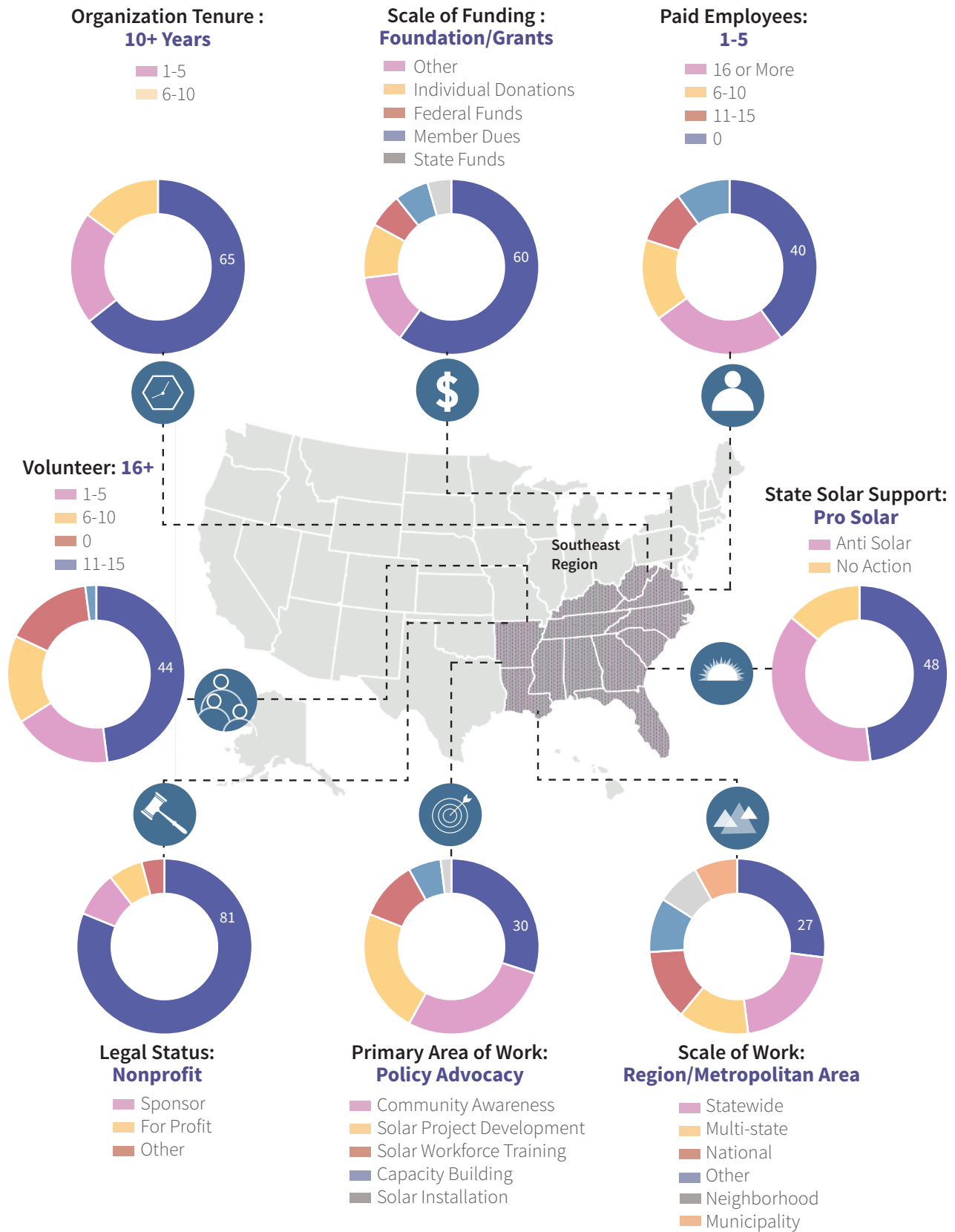
This regional summary for the Southeast presents the findings from a national survey of Community-Based Organizations (CBOs). This overview summarizes the 57 responses from the Southeast region and describes characteristics of CBOs that do work related to solar, including their size, funding, and focuses of their work. The table below includes the most common responses from CBOs in the Southeast region.

Summary of Survey Responses from Southeast CBOs	
Organization Tenure	65% have tenure >10 years; 21% have tenure of 1-5 years
Scale of Work	There is a wide split in the scale of work among CBOs in the region, with 27% focusing on the region/metropolitan area and almost as many focused statewide
Primary Area of Work	There is a wide range of work focus, with 30% focused primarily on policy advocacy while almost as many are focused on community awareness, and slightly fewer focused on solar project development
Legal Status	81% are nonprofits
Paid Employees	30% have 1–5 employees; 16% have no employees
Scale of Funding	60% get the largest share of their funding from foundation grants
Volunteers	More than half have fewer than 10 volunteers, although 44% have more than 16 volunteers
Perceived level of State Solar Support	There are mixed opinions about state government: 48% believe their state government is pro-solar, while most of the rest believe their state government is anti-solar

The research team also used factor analysis to generate variables corresponding to a CBO respondent’s knowledge and focus on eight factors: Energy Independence Awareness, Green Finance Awareness, Communication for Solar Awareness, Degree of Community Solar Awareness, Motivation: Community Energy Sovereignty, Degree of CBO Involvement in Communities Served, Workforce Installation Scale, and Depth of Solar Work.

The Southeast region has the lowest scores for Depth of Solar Work, meaning that CBOs tend to work on solar energy, but do not focus on solar installation projects. In part, this may be because there have been fewer state and utility solar programs for CBOs to participate in than in other parts of the country. Scores for this region also suggest that the communities served are not highly aware of nor understand the benefits of solar, and CBOs are not as focused on building trust, communication strategies, and capacity to raise awareness for residential solar programs. There is also a potential lack of awareness of green finance among CBOs in Southeast. Organizations are highly motivated by Community Energy Sovereignty, meaning they are motivated by community empowerment, economic opportunity, and environmental justice.

Figure 3: Regional Analysis—Southeast



West Community-Based Organizations and Their Relationship to Solar Energy Development: A Summary of Findings

This regional summary for the West presents the findings from a national survey of Community-Based Organizations (CBOs). This overview summarizes the 39 responses from the West region and describes characteristics of CBOs that do work related to solar, including their size, funding, and focuses of their work. The following chart includes the most common responses from CBOs in this region.

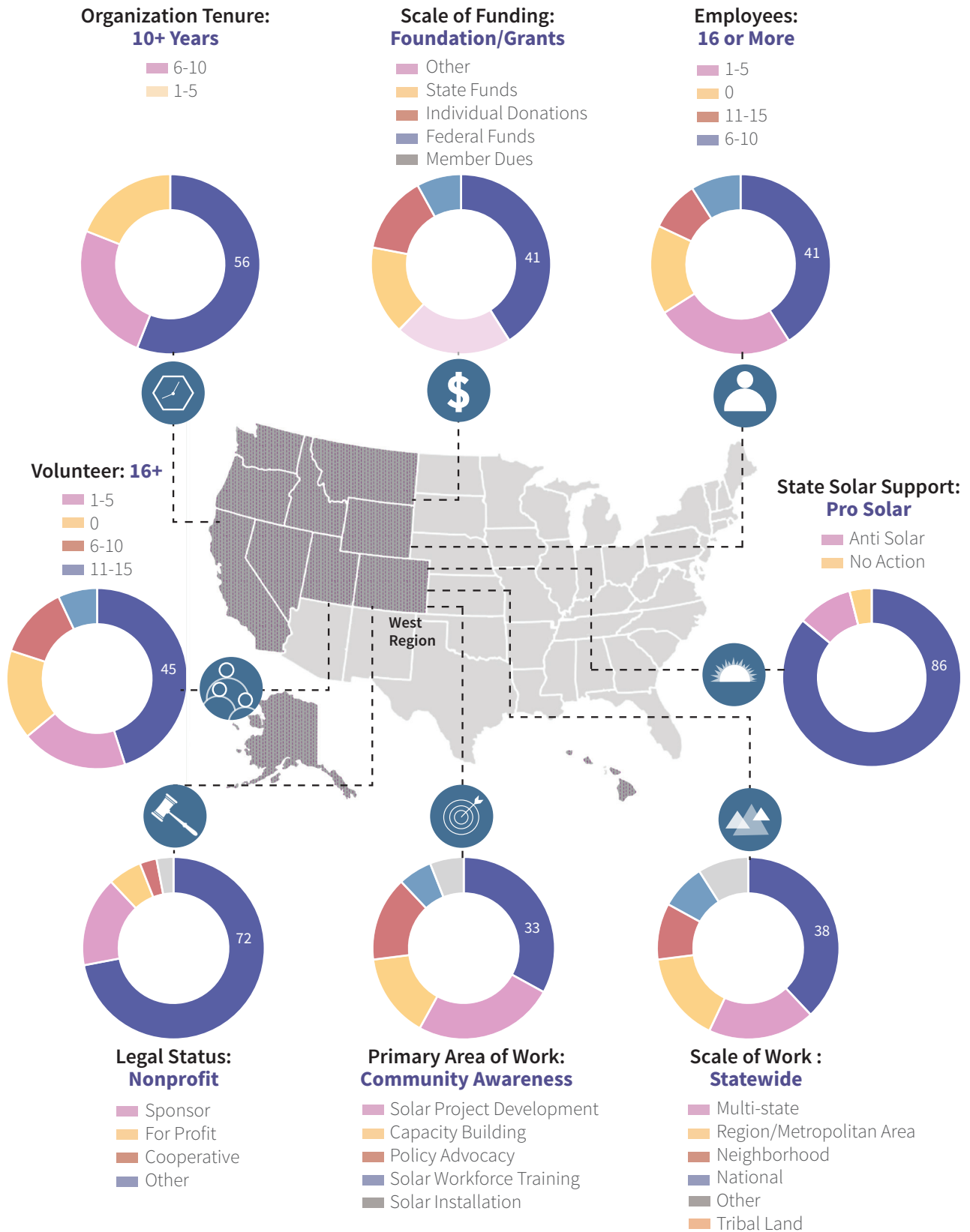
Summary of Survey Responses from West CBOs	
Organization Tenure	56% have an organization tenure >10 years, with most of the rest having 6-10 years
Scale of Work	Statewide and Regional
Primary Area of Work	There is a wide split in the primary area of work, with 33% listing community awareness as primary area and almost as many listing solar project development and slightly fewer listing capacity building
Legal Status	72% are nonprofits
Paid Employees	About half have at least 11 employees, including 41% with at least 16 employees
Scale of Funding	Rely on foundation grants
Volunteers	Most have more than 11 volunteers, including 45% with at least 16 volunteers
Perceived level of State Solar Support	86% reported that their state governments support solar

The research team used factor analysis to generate variables corresponding to a CBO respondent’s knowledge and focus on eight factors: Energy Independence Awareness, Green Finance Awareness, Communication for Solar Awareness, Degree of Community Solar Awareness, Motivation: Community Energy Sovereignty, Degree of CBO Involvement in Communities Served, Workforce Installation Scale, and Depth of Solar Work.

CBOs’ focus and awareness of solar issues vary between the West Coast and the Intermountain West. The Intermountain West focuses much less on workforce training than the West Coast. The Intermountain West also scores the highest on energy independence awareness, while the West Coast scores the lowest. This factor includes variables like familiarity with low-income programs, solar tax credits, and energy burden.

The Intermountain West also has low scores for Community Solar Awareness and communication for Solar Awareness, signifying that organizations are less involved in the communities they serve and are not as focused on building trust, communication strategies, and solar awareness programs as other regions. CBOs on the West Coast region have a high degree of involvement in the communities served. The entire West region has a strong focus on green finance awareness.

Figure 4: Regional Analysis—West



The Clean Energy States Alliance (CESA) is a national, nonprofit coalition of public agencies and organizations working together to advance clean energy. CESA members—mostly state agencies—include many of the most innovative, successful, and influential public funders of clean energy initiatives in the country.

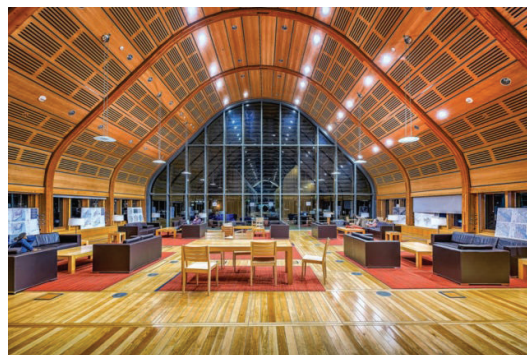


CESA works with state leaders, federal agencies, and other stakeholders to develop and promote clean energy programs and markets, with an emphasis on renewable energy, energy equity, financing strategies, and economic development. CESA facilitates information sharing, provides technical assistance, coordinates multi-state collaborative projects, and communicates the views and achievements of its members.

Ørsted US Offshore Wind/Block Island Wind Farm



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Clockwise from upper left: Shutterstock/Soonthorn Wongsaita; Tom Piorkowski; Resonant Energy; Portland General Electric; RE-volv; Bigstockphoto.com/Davidm199